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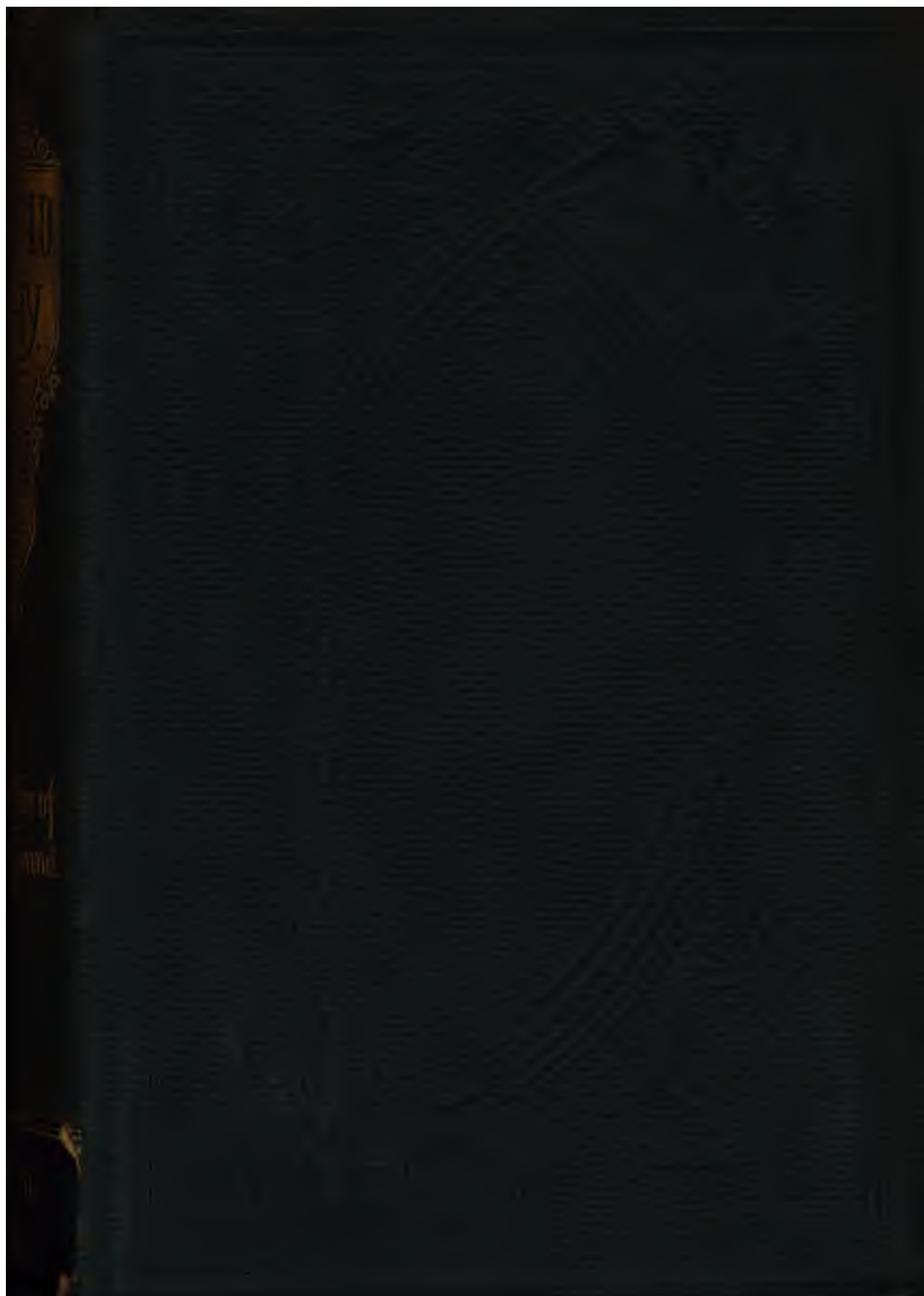
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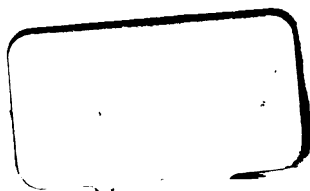
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OSWALD CRAY

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BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF 'EAST LYNN,' 'THE SHADOW OF ASHLYTAT,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

NEAL'S VISIT.

CAUSING the sweeping crape to be taken from his hat, for he preferred to depart on foot, Oswald Cray proceeded through the town to the house of his brother. Just as he reached the door, Mark rode up on horseback and leaped off with a hasty spring, throwing his bridle to the man who waited.

"Of course I am too late!" he exclaimed.

"Of course you are, by pretty near two hours. How did it happen, Mark?"

"Well—I can hardly tell how it happened," was the answer of Mark. "I had a patient to see in the country—more than one, in fact—and I thought I could do it all first and be back in time. But I suppose I must have stayed later than I purposed, for before I was ready to return I found it was half-past eleven, and the funeral no doubt over. And then I did not hurry myself."

They were walking across the hall to the dining-room as he said this. Caroline was seated at the table, her work-box before her, doing some embroidery. She flung the work down, rose, and confronted her husband.

"Mark, why did you do this? You went into the country to avoid the funeral!"

"I—I did what?" exclaimed Mark. "Nonsense, Carrie! Why should I wish to avoid the funeral? I have attended plenty of funerals in my time."

Oswald turned quickly and looked at Mark. It was not the accusation of Mrs Cray that had aroused his attention, *that* went for nothing; but something peculiar in Mark's tone as he answered it. To Oswald's ears it spoke of evasion. He could not see his face. It was bent, and he was slapping his dusty boots with his riding whip.

"But why DID you go into the country?" pursued Caroline. "It was half-past ten when you were here, and I warned you then it was getting time to dress. When I saw your horse brought to the door and you gallop off on him, I could not believe my eyes."

"Well, I mistook the time, that's the fact. I am very sorry for it, but it can't be helped now. Of course I should like to have attended and paid her

my last respects, poor lady. Not but that I dare say there were enough without me. I was not missed."

"But you were missed," said Oswald, "and waited for too. It threw us pretty nearly half-an-hour behindhand. I should not like to keep a funeral waiting myself, Mark."

"Who was there?" asked Mark.

"The two relatives of Lady Oswald, Sir Philip and his son, Dr Davenal and myself."

"Davenal was there, then. But of course he would be. Then he served to do duty for me and himself. And so Sir Philip came!"

"I should be surprised had he not come."

"Should you! He is a cranky sort of gentleman: an Oswald all over. You are another of them, Oswald. I wonder if you'll get cranky in your old age."

"Don't listen to him, Oswald," interposed Mrs Cray. "He seems 'cranky' himself this morning."

Mark laughed good-humouredly, and tossed a late China rose to Caroline which he had brought home in his button-hole. "Did you hear the will read, Oswald?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Short and sweet!" cried Mark, alluding to the monosyllable, which it must be confessed was given

in a curt, displeased tone, as if its speaker were himself displeased. "I think it is you who are cranky, Oswald."

Oswald smiled. "A thought was causing me vexation, Mark."

"Vexation at me?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, and who comes in for the money? The Stephensons?"

"No. The Stephensons come in for a very poor portion. It is left to Dr Davenal."

"To Dr Davenal!" echoed Mark in his astonishment. "No!"

"The bulk of the money is bequeathed to him. All of it, in fact, with the exception of a few trifling legacies. The Stephensons have fifty pounds each and the furniture."

Caroline had dropped her embroidery again and was gazing at Oswald, apparently unable to take in the news. "Are you telling us this for a joke?" she asked.

"The money is left to Dr Davenal, Mrs Cray," repeated Oswald, and certainly there was no sound of joking in his tone. "It surprised us all."

"What a lucky man!" exclaimed Mark. "I wonder if he had any prevision of this yesterday?"

"We were speaking of money, he and I. It was about that field behind the doctor's stables, the one he has so long wanted to buy. The owner's dead, and it is for sale at last. I observed to the doctor that I supposed he'd secure it at once, but he said he should not buy it at all; he had had a heavy loss, and could not afford it——"

"It is not true, Mark!" interrupted his wife.

"It is true, Caroline. But don't you go and repeat it again. He said, moreover, he had great need himself of a thousand or two, and did not know where to turn to for it. Mind you, I believe he was betrayed, as it were, out of the avowal, I had been saying so much about the field: for he brought himself suddenly up as though recollection had come to him, and said, 'Don't talk of this, Mark!'"

And Mark's long tongue *had* talked of it! Oswald Cray listened to its every word.

"If he could but have foreseen then that this money had dropped to him! And yet—I should think he must have known it from Lady Oswald; or partially known it. How much is it, Oswald?"

"Six or seven thousand pounds. It would have been a great deal more but for certain losses. Wedderburn said she was persuaded to embark money in some speculation; and it failed."

"How stupid of her!" exclaimed free Mark. "I wonder, now, whether the doctor did know of this! If he did he'd keep his own counsel. Did he appear surprised, Oswald?"

"He was not there. He left before the will was read, saying he had to attend a consultation."

"Well, so he had," said Mark; "I happen to know that much. It was for half-past twelve."

So far, then, Dr Davenal had spoken truth. A doubt had been crossing Oswald's mind, amidst many other curious doubts, whether Dr Davenal had made the excuse to get away, and so avoid hearing the will read, and himself named chief legatee.

He remained some time with Mark and his wife. They asked him to stay for dinner, but he declined. He had ordered a chop to be ready at the "Apple Tree," and was going back to London early in the evening—by that seven o'clock train you have before heard of.

"Had you any particular motive for absenting yourself from Lady Oswald's funeral?" he asked of Mark, as the latter accompanied him to the street-door on his departure.

"Not I," answered Mark, with the most apparent readiness. "It was very bungling of me to mistake the time. Not that I like attending funerals as a

matter of taste : I don't know who does. Good afternoon, Oswald. You must give us a longer visit when you are down next."

He stood at the abbey-door, watching his brother wind round the branching rails, for Oswald was taking the station on his way to his inn. Very cleverly, in Mark's own opinion, had he parried the questions of his purposed absence. His absence *was* purposed. With that chloroform on his conscience he did not care to attend the funeral of Lady Oswald.

And the afternoon went on.

It was growing dusk, was turned half-past six, and Oswald Cray was beginning to think it time to make ready for his departure. He had not stirred from the chair where he eat his dinner, though the meal was over long ago ; had not called for lights ; had, in fact, waved John Hamos away when he would have appeared with them. His whole range of thought was absorbed by one topic—his doubts of Dr Davenal.

Yes, it is of no use to deny it ; it had come to that with Oswald Cray—doubts. Doubts he scarcely knew of what, or to what extent ; he scarcely knew where these doubts or his own thoughts were carrying him. On the previous night he had for a few moments given the reins to imagination ; had allowed

himself to suppose, for argument's sake only, that Dr Davenal had given that chloroform knowing or fancying it might prove fatal, and he had gone so far as to ask what, then, could be his motive. There was no motive ; Oswald glanced on each side of him to every point, and could discover no motive whatever, or appearance of motive. Therefore he had thrust the doubts from him, as wanting foundation.

But had the revelations of this day supplied the link that was wanting ? Had they not supplied it ? *The death of Lady Oswald brought a fortune to Dr Davenal.*

Almost hating himself for pursuing these thoughts, or rather for the obligation to pursue them, for they would haunt him, and he could not help himself, Oswald Cray sat on in the fading light. He said to himself, how absurd, nay, how wicked it was of him, and yet he could not shake them off. The more he strove to do so, the more he brought reason to his aid, telling him that Dr Davenal was a good and honourable and upright man, as he had always believed, the less would reason hold the mastery. Imagination was all too present in its most vivid colouring, and it was chaining him to its will.

What were the simple facts ? asked reason. Dr Davenal had caused Lady Oswald to inhale chloro-

form, having only some hours previously avowed to Oswald his belief that she was a most unfit subject for it, was one of those few to whom the drug proves fatal. It did prove fatal. There had next been some equivocation on the part of Mark, when questioned about it, and there had been the positive refusal of Dr Davenal to afford any explanation. Next there had been the discovery of the day—that Dr Davenal was the inheritor. Well, it might all be explained away, reason said; it was certainly not enough to attribute to Dr Davenal the worst social crime contained in the Decalogue. But the more Oswald Cray dwelt on this view, or tried to dwell upon it, the more persistently rose up imagination, torturing and twisting facts, and bending them as it pleased.

There had been that hint of Neal's too! Oswald Cray honestly believed that Neal was one of those servants incapable of speaking ill for ill's sake; and he could not help wondering what he meant. Neal was not an ignorant man, likely to be deceived, to take up fancies: he was of superior intelligence, quite an educated man for his class of life. If ———

Oswald's thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of his landlord. "I don't want lights, John; I told you I did not. I shall be going directly."

"It is not lights, sir. Mr Neal, Dr Davenal's servant, is asking to see you."

"Neal! Let him come in."

Neal came forward into the dusky room. He was the bearer of a note from his master. Oswald had a light brought in then, and opened it. It was written in pencil.

"MY DEAR MR OSWALD CRAY,

"I very much wish to see you if you can spare me an hour. I thought perhaps you would have dropped in this lonely day and taken a knife and fork with us. Will you come down this evening?

"Ever sincerely yours,

"RICHARD DAVENAL."

"Neal, will you tell Dr Davenal—he is expecting me, I find?"

"I think so, sir. He said to me before dinner that he thought you might be coming in. When he found you did not, and they were sitting down to table, he wrote this in pencil, and bade me call one of the maids to wait, while I brought it up to you."

"Tell the doctor that I am quite unable to come down. I have to return to London by the seven o'clock train."

"Very well, sir."

Neal was leaving the room, but Mr Oswald Cray stopped him. He had taken a sudden resolution, and he spoke on the spur of the moment, without reflection. The perplexity of his mind may be his excuse.

"Neal, have you any objection to tell me what you meant last night by hinting that Lady Oswald had not come fairly by her death?"

Neal paused. He was a man of caution; he liked to calculate his words and his ways before entering on them. Neal would certainly speak if he dared. He was in a very bitter mood, for the day's doings had not pleased him. The news had reached him that her ladyship's money had been all left to Dr Davenal; that he, Neal, was not so much as named in the will. And Neal had looked forward as confidently as had the Reverend Mr Stephenson to the hope of some little remembrance being left to him. In his terrible anger, it seemed to him that the one enemy to prevent it had been the great inheritor, Dr Davenal.

"Sir, if I speak, would you give me your promise first, to hold what I say sacred to yourself; to let it go no further? I know, sir, it is not the place of a servant to ask this confidence of a gentleman, but I should be afraid to speak without it."

"I will give it you," said Mr Oswald Cray. "You may rely upon me."

And Neal knew that if there was one man more than another on the face of the earth who would never forfeit his word, upon whom implicit trust might be placed, it was Oswald Cray. Neal set himself to his task. First of all opening the door to make sure they were entirely alone, he dropped his voice to a safe whisper, and described what he had seen and heard on the Sunday night. It was certainly a startling narration, and as Oswald Cray listened to it in that darkened room,—for the one candle, now placed on a side-table behind, only served to throw out the shadows,—listened to the hushed tones, the unexplainable words, a curious feeling of dread began to creep over him. Neal, you may be very sure, did not disclose anything that could bear against himself; he contrived to come out well in it. He was standing outside for a moment before going to bed, hoping the air would remove the sad headache which had suddenly seized him upon hearing of the death of his late lady, when he saw the man come in in the extraordinary manner he had just described. Believing him to be nothing less than a housebreaker (and Watton, who had seen the man from her room up-stairs, had come to the same conclusion), or an evil character of some sort, getting in plausibly on false pretences to work harm

to Dr Davenal, he had gone to the window to look in out of anxiety for his master's safety, and there had heard what he had stated, for the window was thrown open. He could not see the visitor, who was seated in the shade : he only heard sufficient to tell him that the business he had come on was Lady Oswald's death ; and he heard Dr Davenal acknowledge that it was murder, and that it must be hushed up at any price, even if it cost him his fortune. He, Neal, described the utterly prostrate condition of his master that night ; both before and after the interview with the visitor, he was like one who has some dreadful secret upon the mind, some heavy guilt ; Neal had thought so, before ever the man, whoever he might have been, entered the house.

Will it be forgiven to Oswald Cray if in that brief confused moment he believed the worst—believed all that Neal said to him ? His mind was in a chaos of perplexity, almost, it may be said, of terror. Nothing was clear. He could not analyse, he could not reason : Neal's words, and the doings of the night which the man was describing, seemed to dance before his mind in confused forms, ever changing, as do the bits of coloured glass in a kaleidoscope. Neal continued to speak, but he did not hear him distinctly now ; the words reached his senses certainly, but

more as if he were in a mazy dream. He heard the man reiterate that wherever it was his master had gone to, that night, remaining away until the Wednesday, it was connected with the death of Lady Oswald ; he heard him say that, whatever the mystery and the guilt, Miss Sara Davenal had been made the confidant of it by her father, he, Neal, supposed from some imperative motive which he did not pretend to understand. Oswald heard like one in a dream, the words partially glancing off his mind even as they were spoken, only to be recalled afterwards with redoubled force.

In the midst of it he suddenly looked at his watch, suspecting—as he found—that he had barely time to catch the train.

And he went out in a sort of blind confusion, his brain echoing the words of Dr Davenal, only too accurately remembered and repeated by Neal. " Murder ? Yes, the world would look upon it as such. I felt certain that Lady Oswald was one to whom chloroform, if administered, would prove fatal."

CHAPTER XXIV.

DR DAVENAL'S "FOLLY."

It was startling news to go forth to Hallingham—one of the nine days' wonders read of in social history. Lady Oswald had bequeathed her fortune to her physician, Dr Davenal! Such things had been known before in the world's experiences, but Hallingham made as much of the fact as if that were the first time it had ever been enacted.

Upon none did the news fall with more complete astonishment than upon the doctor himself. Lady Oswald had more than once in the past few months mysteriously hinted to him that he would be rewarded some time for his care and attention to her; and it must be supposed that she had these hints in her mind when she said to Mr Oswald Cray that "he" (the named inheritor of her money) knew that he would be rewarded. Upon Dr Davenal the hints had never

made any impression. Of a nature the very reverse of covetous, simple-minded, single-hearted, it never so much as crossed his imagination that she would be leaving her money to *him*. He would have been the first to repudiate it; to point out to her the injustice of the act.

It is surely not necessary to premise that you, my intelligent and enlightened readers, cannot have fallen into the mistake made by Neal, or drawn that respected domestic's very absurd, though perhaps to a fanciful and prejudiced mind not unnatural, deduction, that the night-visit to Dr Davenal had reference to Lady Oswald's death. Being in the secret of who really did administer that fatal dose of chloroform to Lady Oswald, you will not connect it with Dr Davenal's trouble. A heavy secret, involving disgrace, much misery, perhaps ruin, had indeed fallen that night on Dr Davenal, but it was entirely unconnected with the death of Lady Oswald. The words which Neal had heard—and he heard them correctly—would have borne to his mind a very different interpretation had he been enabled to hear the *whole*—what had preceded them and what followed them. But he did not.

Yes, this unhappy secret, this great misfortune, had nothing to do with Lady Oswald. Far from Dr

Davenal's having caused her to inhale an extra dose of chloroform as an experiment, on the strength that it might prove fatal, and so enable him to drop at once into that very desirable legacy named in her will, and which supposition, I am sure you will agree with me in thinking, belongs rather to the world of idealic wonders than of real life, the doctor had not the faintest suspicion that he should inherit a shilling. When the news was conveyed to him he could not believe it to be true,—did not believe it for some little time.

It was Mr Wedderburn who carried it to him. When the lawyer's business was over at Lady Oswald's, he proceeded to Dr Davenal's and found him just come home from the consultation, to attend which he had hurried away before the reading of the will. Mr Wedderburn told him the news.

"Left to me!" exclaimed the doctor. "Her money left to me! Nonsense!"

"It is indeed," affirmed Mr Wedderburn. "After the legacies are paid you take everything—you are residuary legatee."

"You are joking," said the doctor. "What have I to do with the money? I have no right to it."

With some difficulty Dr Davenal was convinced that he and he alone was named the inheritor. It

did not give him pleasure. Quite the contrary; he saw in it only a good deal of trouble and law business, which he much disliked at all times to engage in.

Richard Davenal was one of those thoroughly conscientious men—and there are a few such in the world—who could not be content to enjoy money to which another has more right. It was a creed of his—it is not altogether an obsolete one—that money so enjoyed could not bring pleasure in the spending, or good in the end. Lady Oswald had legitimate relations, who had looked for the money, who needed the money, needed it with a far deeper need than Dr Davenal, and who possessed a claim to it, so far as relationship could give it them. Even as the conviction slowly arose to him that the news was true that he had been made the inheritor, so there arose another conviction, or rather a resolution, with it,—that he would never accept the money, that it should go over to its legitimate owners, no matter what trouble it involved. A resolution from which he never swerved.

Never. Not even in the moment when a tempter's voice arose within him, whispering how well this legacy would serve to replace that great sum, the savings of years, which he had been obliged to part with only that very week. Partly to satisfy a

debt of which until then he had known nothing, had he parted with it; partly as hush-money, to keep down that terrible secret whispered to him on the Sunday night. The thought certainly did arise—that it almost seemed as if this money had been sent to him to replace it; but he did not allow it to obtain weight. It would have been simply impossible for Dr Davenal to act against his conscience.

“I shall refuse the legacy,” he remarked to Mr Wedderburn. “I have no right to it.”

“What did you say?” asked the lawyer, believing he did not properly catch the words.

“I shall not accept this money. It is none of mine. It ought to be none of mine. It must go to Lady Oswald’s relatives.”

“But it is yours, Dr Davenal. It is bequeathed to you in the will.”

“I don’t care for the will. I should not care for ten wills, if I had no right to the money they bequeathed me. I have no right to this, and I will not touch a farthing of it.”

Mr Wedderburn’s surprise could only expend itself in one long stare. In all his lawyerly experience he had never come across an announcement so savouring of chivalry. The legatees he had had the pleasure of doing business with were only too eager to grasp

their good fortune, and if any little inconvenient pricks of conscience were so ill-mannered as to arise, they were speedily despatched back again by the very legal thought—If I do take it I but obey the will.

"There never was such a thing heard of, as the refusing of a fortune legally bequeathed," cried the lawyer.

"I daresay there has been, many a time. If not, this will be a precedent."

"You'll be so laughed at," persisted Mr Wedderburn. "You'll be set down—I'm afraid people will be for setting you down as a lunatic."

"Let them," said the doctor. "They shan't confine me as one without my own certificate. Mr Wedderburn," he continued in a graver tone, "I am serious in this refusal. I feel that I have no right whatever to this money of Lady Oswald's. She has paid me liberally for my services——"

"If you only knew how many thousands inherit money daily who have no right to it," interrupted Mr Wedderburn.

"Doubtless they do. I was going to observe that it is not so much my having no right to it, that would cause me to decline, as the fact that others exist who have a right. I——"

"But the will gives you a right," interposed the lawyer, unable to get over his surprise.

"A legal right, I am aware it does. But not a just one. No, I will not accept this legacy."

"What will you do about it, then?"

The doctor was silent for a minute. "I should wish the money to be appropriated just as though there had been no Dr Davenal in existence. You say this will was made but about six months ago. It must have superseded another will, I presume?"

"It may be said that it superseded several," was the reply. "Lady Oswald was constantly making wills. She had made some half-dozen before this last one."

"And each one disposing of her property differently?" quickly asked the doctor.

"Yes, or nearly so. Twice she bequeathed it to her nephews, the Stephensons. Once it was left to Mr Oswald Cray; once to charities; once to Sir Philip Oswald. She has been exceedingly capricious."

"All the more reason why I should not take it now," warmly cried Dr Davenal. "She must have left it to me in a moment of caprice; and had she lived a few months longer this will would have been revoked as the rest have been. Mr Wedderburn,

were I capable of acting upon it, of taking the money, I should lose all self-respect for ever. I could not, as a responsible being, responsible to One who sees and judges all I do, be guilty of so crying an injustice."

Mr Wedderburn suppressed a shrug of the shoulders. He could only look at these affairs with a lawyer's eye and a lawyer's reasoning. Dr Davenal resumed.

"What was the tenor of the will which this last one superseded? Do you recollect?"

"Perfectly. We hold the draft of it still. It was as nearly as possible a counterpart of the present one, excepting as relates to your share in this and that of the brothers Stephenson. In that last will they took your place. The furniture was bequeathed to them, as in this, and also the bulk of the property."

"My name not being mentioned in it?"

"Yes, it was. The diamond ring bequeathed to you now was bequeathed then. Nothing more to you."

"Then that's all right. Now, Mr Wedderburn, listen to me. That diamond ring I will accept with pleasure, as a reminiscence of my poor friend and patient; but I will accept nothing else. Will you be so kind as to destroy this last will, and let the

other be acted upon? I am scaring you, I see. If that cannot legally be done, I must let the money come to me, but only in transit for the rightful owners, the Reverend Mr Stephenson and his brother, and I'll make them a present of it. You will manage this for me. Being at home in law details, you know of course what may and what may not be done. All I beg of you is to effect this, carrying it out in the simplest manner, and in the quickest possible time."

Mr Wedderburn drew a long face. He had no more cause to wish the money to go to Dr Davenal than to the clergyman and his brother, but it was altogether so unusual a mode of proceeding, would be so very unprofessional a transaction, that he regarded it as an innovation hardly to be tolerated, a sort of scandal on all recognised notions in the legal world, of which Mr Wedderburn himself was little better than a machine.

"I cannot undertake it without your giving me instructions in writing, Dr Davenal," he said glumpily. "I'd not stir a peg in it without."

"You shall have them in full."

"Well, sir, you know best, but the time may come when your children will not thank you for this. It is folly, Dr Davenal, and nothing less."

"I hope my children will never question any act of mine. I am doing this for the best."

Nevertheless, as Dr Davenal spoke, there was some pain in his tone. The lawyer detected it, and thought he was coming round. He would not speak immediately, but let the feeling work its way.

"It is a large sum to relinquish," the lawyer presently said; "to throw out of one's hand as if it were so much worthless sand."

"What is the sum?—what has she left?" asked Dr Davenal, the remark reminding him that he was as yet in ignorance.

"I expect, when all the legacies and other expenses are paid, there will be a little over six thousand pounds. There ought to have been double. Lady Oswald lost a large sum a few years ago, quite as much as that. She put it into some prosperous-looking bubble, and it burst. Women should never dabble in business. They are safe to get their fingers burnt."

"Men have burnt theirs sometimes," was the answer of Dr Davenal, spoken significantly. "Six thousand pounds! I should have thought her worth much more. Well, Mr Wedderburn, you will carry out my instructions."

"Of course, if you order me. Will you be so

kind as to write those instructions to me at your convenience, posting them from this town to my house. I am going back home at once."

"Won't you see Mr Stephenson and his brother first, and impart to them the fact that I shall not take the money?"

"No," said the lawyer, "I want to go home by the next train. I wish, Dr Davenal, you would allow me to give you just one word of advice."

"You can give it me," said Dr Davenal. "I don't promise to take it."

"It might be the better for you if you would," was the reply. "My advice is, say nothing to the Stephensons, or to any one else, to-day. This is a very strange resolution that you have expressed, and I beg you to sleep upon it. A night's rest may serve to change your mind."

The lawyer departed. It was close upon the hour for Dr Davenal to receive his indoor patients, and he could not go out then. He went to look for his daughter, and found her in the garden parlour with her aunt. It was not often that Miss Bettina troubled that room—she had been wont to tell Sara and Caroline that its litter set her teeth on edge.

They began to talk to him of the funeral. It was natural they should do so. In a country place these

somewhat unusual occurrences of every-day life are made much of. Miss Bettina was curious.

"Were the people from Thorndyke there?" she asked.

"Sir Philip and his eldest son."

"And Oswald Cray?"

"Of course. He came down on purpose."

"My goodness! And so they met! How did they behave, Richard?"

"Just as the rest of us behaved. Did you suppose they'd start a quarrel?"

"I was sure of it. I knew they would never meet without starting one. Nothing less could come of Oswald Cray's proud spirit and the manner they have treated him."

"At sea as usual, Bettina. Do you think they'd quarrel *there*?—on that solemn occasion? Oswald Cray and Sir Philip are proud enough, both of them; but they are *gentlemen*—you forget that, Bettina. I think Oswald Cray is about the least likely man to quarrel that I know, whether with Sir Philip or with any body else. Your proud man washes his hands of people whom he despises; but he does not quarrel with them."

How singularly true were the words in regard to Oswald Cray! It was as though Dr Davenal had

worn in that moment the gift of prevision ; " Your proud man washes his hands of people whom he despises."

" And how is her money left ?" continued Miss Bettina. " To the Stephensons ?"

" No, she has not made a just will. It is left to —to a stranger. A stranger in blood."

" Indeed ! To whom ? I hope *you* have been remembered with some little token, Richard ?"

" To be sure I have been. You know those two splendid diamond rings of hers : I have one, Oswald Cray the other. And that's all he has got, by the way, except a silver coffee-pot, or so. Sara, come with me into the garden, I wish to have a little chat with you."

" You have not told me who the stranger is," shrieked out Miss Bettina.

" I'll tell you by-and-by," called back the doctor.

" I did not think it likely she would leave anything to Oswald Cray, papa," Sara remarked, as they paced the garden path.

" I think I should, had I been in her place. A matter of five hundred pounds, or so, would have helped him on wonderfully. However, there was no obligation, and it is a question whether Oswald would have accepted it."

"You said it was not a just will, papa?"

"I could have gone further than that, Sara, and stigmatised it as a very unjust one. Those poor Stephensons, who have been expecting this money—who had a right to expect it—are cut off with a paltry fifty pounds each and the furniture."

"Oh, papa! And are they not very poor?"

"So poor, that I believe honestly they have not always bread to eat; that is, what people, born as they were, designate as bread; proper food. They carry the signs of it in their countenances."

"And for Lady Oswald to have left her money away from them! To whom has she left it?"

"To one who has no right to it, who never expected it."

"I suppose you mean Sir Philip?"

"No, it is not left to him. But now, give me your opinion, Sara. Let us for argument's sake put ourselves in the position of this fortunate legatee. Suppose—suppose, my dear, it were left to *you*: this money to which you have no claim, no right—to which others have a claim, how should you feel?"

"I should feel uncomfortable," replied Sara. "I should feel that I was enriched at the expense of the Stephensons; I am sure that I should feel almost as though I had committed a fraud. Papa," she added

more eagerly, the idea occurring to her, "I should like to give the money back to them."

"That is the very argument I have been using myself. Wedderburn, Lady Oswald's lawyer, has been here, talking of the matter, and I told him that were I the man to whom it was left, I should give it back, every shilling of it, to the channel where it ought at once to have gone—the brothers Stephenson. Wedderburn did not agree with me: he brought forward the argument that the man's children might reproach him afterwards. What do you think?"

"I think, papa, that were I the man you speak of, I should act upon my own judgment, and give it back without reference to the opinion of my children."

"That is precisely what he has resolved to do. Sara, the money is left to me."

Sara Davenal, taken completely by surprise, halted in her walk and looked at the doctor, not knowing how to believe him.

"It is true, Sara. I find I am the favoured legatee of Lady Oswald: knowing at the same time that I have no more right to be so than have those espalier rose-trees at your side. I have resolved to refuse the money; to repudiate the will altogether, so far as my share in it goes; and to suffer a previous will to be acted upon, which gives the money to the Stephen-

sona. I trust my children will not hereafter turn round and reproach me."

"Oh, papa!"

She spoke the words now almost reproachfully, in reproach that he could ever think it.

"Yes, I shall do it, Sara. And yet," he added, his voice insensibly sinking to a whisper, "I have heavy need for money just now; and the help these thousands would be to me no one but myself knows."

Sara was silent. A shiver passed over her face at the allusion. She did not dare reply to it. The subject was too painful; and, besides, she was kept partially in the dark.

"But I cannot tamper with my conscience," resumed Dr Davenal. "Were I to take this money, it would only lie like a weight upon it for my whole future life. I believe—and, Sara, I wish you to believe it and treasure it as an assured truth—that money appropriated by ourselves, which in point of right, of justice, belongs to others, *never* comes home to us with a blessing. However safely the law may give it us and the world deem our claim to it legitimate, if we deprive others of it, whose it is by every moral and—may I say it?—divine right, that money will not bless us or our children. Sara, I speak this from the experience of an observant life."

"I am sure you are right, papa," she murmured.
"Do not keep this money."

"I shall not. But, Sara,"—and Dr Davenal stopped in his walk, and his voice grew solemn in its tone as he laid his hand upon her—"things have changed with me. I cannot now foresee the future. I thought I was laying up a competency for my children; not a great one, it is true, but one that would have kept them above the extreme frowns of the world. This I have had to fling away—my hard-earned savings. It may be, that I shall now have to leave you, my cherished daughter, to the world's mercy; perhaps—I know not—compelled to work for your living in it. Should this come to pass, you will not cast back a reflection on your dead father, and reproach him for the rejection of these thousands."

The tears were streaming down her cheeks. Her pleading hand, her loving look, was his first answer.
"You could not keep the money, papa. It would not be right in God's sight. Do not hesitate."

"I have not hesitated, Sara. My mind has been made up from the first. But I preferred to speak to you."

Neal came forward to summon Dr Davenal. His patients were waiting for him. Sara turned to rejoin her aunt.

"You can tell her about this legacy to me, Sara ; it will be the talk of the town before the day's out. And explain to her why I decline it."

The afternoon drew to its close. Dr Davenal, engaged with a succession of patients, scarcely noticed its elapse. A wish was running through his mind to see Mr Oswald Cray, and he hoped he would be calling. When dinner-time came and he had not come, that note, previously mentioned, was pencilled, and Neal despatched with it.

The man brought the message back in due course : "Mr Oswald Cray was unable to call upon the doctor, as he was departing for London." Dr Davenal was disappointed ; he had wished to explain to Oswald Cray his intentions respecting the money ; he considered it due to him, Oswald, to do so.

How is it that there are times when an idea, without any apparent cause to lead to it, any reason to justify it, takes sudden possession of the mind ? Even as Neal spoke, such an idea seated itself in Dr Davenal's. He fancied that Oswald Cray was in some way not pleased at the disposition of Lady Oswald's property, as regarded Dr Davenal ; was in a degree, more or less, resenting it. It only made the doctor doubly desirous of seeing him.

But there was no chance of it at present, Oswald

Cray having left Hallingham. Dr Davenal put on his hat and went out to take a walk as far as Lady Oswald's.

He found the Rev. Mr Stephenson alone. His brother had departed. The clergyman received him somewhat awkwardly. He had been brooding over his disappointment all by himself ; had been thinking what a crying wrong it was that the money should be left to the flourishing and wealthy physician, Dr Davenal, who put as many guineas into his pocket daily, as would keep him and his family in their humble way for months. He was casting his anxious thoughts to the future, wondering how his children were to be educated, foreseeing nothing but embarrassment and struggle to the very end of his life ; and I am not sure that his heart at that moment towards that one man, was not full of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. Ministers of the gospel are but human, swayed at times by evil passions, just as we are.

But, being in this frame of mind, it a little confused the reverend gentleman to see the object of his envy standing before him. Dr Davenal drew forward a seat.

"I daresay, Mr Stephenson, if the truth were known, you were at this very moment bestowing upon me plenty of hard names."

It was so exceedingly like what Mr Stephenson had been doing, that all the reply he could make was a confused stammer. Dr Davenal, who, for the interview, appeared to have put away from the surface his hidden care, resumed in a frank, free tone—

“I have no right to the money, have I? It ought to have gone to you and your brother?”

“Well, sir—perhaps you had been led to expect it by Lady Oswald,” was the clergyman’s answer. Of a timid and refined nature, he could not, to Dr Davenal’s face, express his sense of the wrong. With Dr Davenal before him, cordial and open, he began to think the wrong less. That is, that it was not so much the doctor’s fault, as he had been angrily deeming.

“No, she never led me to expect anything of the sort; and you cannot be more surprised than I am at its being left to me,” said the doctor. “When Mr Wedderburn came to me with the news, I could not believe him. However, it appears to be the fact.”

“Yes,” meekly rejoined the clergyman; “it is.”

“And I have now come to inform you, that I shall not take the money, Mr Stephenson. Not a stiver of it. The will, so far as it concerns me, may be regarded as a dead letter, for all practical use. I have

desired Mr Wedderburn to transfer the money to you and your brother ; and if this may not legally be, if I must, despite myself, accept the money, I only take it to restore it to you. You will not be too proud to accept it from me ?”

Was he listening to fact ?—or was he in a dream ? The words, to the minister’s ear, did not savour of reality. His pale face grew moist with emotion, his trembling hands entwined their thin fingers together. He did not dare to ask, Was it real ? lest the answer should dissolve the spell, and prove it but illusion.

“ I could not accept of this great sum to the prejudice of others who have a right to it,” resumed Dr Davenal. “ I should fear its proving something like ill-gotten gains, that bring evil with them, instead of good. The money shall be yours and your brother’s, Mr Stephenson, just as surely as though it had been left to you by Lady Oswald. The diamond ring I shall keep and value, but not a shilling of the money. I thought I would come up and tell you this.”

The tears were welling into that poor gentleman’s eyes, as he rose and clasped the hand of Dr Davenal. “ If you could see what I have suffered ; if you could only imagine the struggle life has been to me, you would know what I feel at this moment. Heaven send its blessings on your generosity !”

The doctor quitted him. He had found a heavy heart, he left a glad one. He quitted him and went forth into the stillness of the autumn night.

He glanced towards the bright stars as he walked along, thinking of the future. And a prayer went up from his heart to the throne of heaven—that, if it was God's will, his children might not feel hereafter the sacrifice he had made—that God would bless them and be merciful to them when he should be gone. The last few days had been sufficient to teach Dr Davenal, had he never known it before, in how great need the apparently safest amongst us stand of this ever-loving mercy.

CHAPTER XXV.

COMPANY FOR MR OSWALD CRAY.

FOR some days subsequent to the interview with Neal, and that valuable servant's startling communication, Mr Oswald Cray remained in what may be called a sea of confusion. The unhappy circumstances attendant on Lady Oswald's death never left his mind, the strange suspicions first arising naturally, as they did arise, and then augmented by Neal's disclosure, seemed to be ever waging hot war within him, for they were entirely antagonistic to sober reason, to his life-long experience of Dr Davenal.

It cannot be denied that Oswald Cray, calm of temperament, though he was, sound of judgment, did fall into the snare that the web of events had woven around him ; and, in the midnight watches, when things wear to our senses a weird, ghostlike

hue, the disagreeable word, murder, suggested itself to him oftener than he would have cared to confess in broad, matter-of-fact daylight. But as the days went on, his senses came to him. Reason re-asserted her empire, and he flung the dark doubt from him, as unworthy of himself and the present enlightened age. It was impossible to connect such a crime with Dr Davenal.

But still, though he shook off the worst view, he could not shake off the circumstances and their suspicion. Perhaps it was next to impossible, knowing what he did know of the doctor's sentiments as to chloroform, hearing as he had heard, Neal's account of the words spoken at the midnight interview, that he should shake them off. They turned and twisted themselves about in his mind in spite of his will ; he would have given much to get rid of them, but he could not. Now taking one phase, now another, now looking dark, now light, there they were, like so many phantoms, ever springing up from different corners of his mind, and putting legitimate thoughts out of it. Up and in bed, at work or at rest, were those conflicting arguments ever dancing attendance on him, until, from sheer perplexity, his brain would seem to lose its subtle powers, and grow dull from very weariness. But the worst aspect of the affair

gradually lost its impression, and reason drove away the high colours of imagination.

The conclusion to which he at length came, and in which he finally settled down, was that Dr Davenal had been in a partial degree guilty. He *could not* think that he had given that chloroform to Lady Oswald with the deliberate view of taking her life, as some of our worst criminals have taken lives; but he did believe there was some hidden culpability attached to it. Could it have been given in forgetfulness?—or by way of experiment?—or carelessly? Oswald Cray asked himself those questions ten times in a day. No, no, reason answered; Dr Davenal was not a man to forget, or to experimentalise, or to do things carelessly. And then, with the answer, rose the one dark, awful doubt again, tormenting him not less with its shadows than with its preposterous absurdity.

What clung to his mind more than all the rest was, that he could see no solution, or chance of solution to the question of why chloroform was administered, why even it was taken to the house. Had Dr Davenal frankly answered him when questioned, "I thought, in spite of my conversation with you, that chloroform might be ventured upon with safety, that it would ease her sufferings, and was absolutely

necessary to calm her state of excitement," why he could have had no more to say, however lamenting the fatal effects. But Dr Davenal had answered nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he had been mysterious over it, and at length flatly refused to satisfy him at all. So far as Oswald Cray could see, there was no other solution, then or ever, that could be arrived at, save that the chloroform had been administered wilfully and deliberately. If so, then with what view had Dr Davenal——

At this point Oswald Cray always pulled his thoughts up, or strove to do so, and plunged desperately into another phase of the affair, as if he would run away from dangerous ground. Once he caught himself wondering whether, if the doctor had been deliberately guilty, it lay in his duty—his, Oswald Cray's—to bring him to account for it. No living being save himself, so far as he trusted, had been cognisant of Dr Davenal's strong opinion of chloroform as applied to Lady Oswald. Ought he, then, not only in the obligation which lies upon all honest men to bring crime to light, but as a connection of Lady Oswald's, ought he to be the Nemesis, and denounce——

With a quicker beating of the heart, with a burning flush upon his brow, Oswald Cray started from

the train of thought. Into what strange gulf was it carrying him? Ah, not though it had been his fate to see the crime committed, and to know that it was a crime, would *he* be the one to bring it home to Richard Davenal? The man whom he had so respected; the father of her who possessed his best love, and who would possess it, in spite of his efforts to withdraw it, for all time? No; not against *him* could his hand be raised in judgment.

In spite of his efforts to withdraw his love? Had it come to that with Oswald Cray? Indeed it had. He could not fathom the affair, it remained to him utterly incomprehensible, but that Dr Davenal was in some way or other compromised by it, terribly compromised, seemed as plain as the sun at noon-day. And Mr Oswald Cray, in his haughty spirit, his besetting pride, decided that he could no longer be on terms of friendship with him, and that Sara Davenal must be no wife of his.

What it cost him to come to this resolution of casting her adrift, none save Heaven knew. The struggle remained on his memory for years afterwards as the sorest pain life had ever brought him. It was the bitter turning-point which too many of us have to arrive at, and pass; the dividing link which dashes away the sunny meads, the flowery

paths of life's young romance, and sends us stumbling and shivering down the stony road of reality. None knew, none ever would know, what that struggle was to Oswald Cray.

Not a struggle as to the course he should pursue—the breaking off intimacy with her : never for a single moment did he hesitate in that. The struggle lay with his feelings, with his own heart, where she was entwined with its every fibre, part and parcel of its very self. He strove to put her out thence, and she would not be put out. There she remained, and he was conscious that there she would remain for many a dreary year to come.

But for his overweening pride, how different things might have been ! He was too just a man to include Sara in the doctor's—dare he say it?—crime. Although Neal had said that Miss Sara Davenal had been made cognisant of it, Oswald did not visit upon her one iota of blame. She was no more responsible for the doctor's acts than he was, neither could she help them. No, he did not cast a shadow of reproach upon her ; she had done nothing to forfeit his love ; but she was her father's daughter, and therefore no fit wife for him. One whose pride was less in the ascendant than Mr Oswald Cray's, whose self-esteem was less sensitively fastidious,

might have acted upon this consciousness of her immunity from blame, and set himself to see whether there was not a way out of the dilemma rather than have given her up, off-hand, at the very first onset. He might have gone in his candour to Dr Davenal and said, "I love your daughter; I had wished to make her my wife; tell me confidentially, is there a reason why I, an honourable man, should not?" Not so Mr Oswald Cray and his haughty pride. Without a single moment of hesitation he shook himself free from all future contact with the daughter of Dr Davenal, just as he was trying to shake her from his heart. Never more, never more, might he look forward to the life of happiness he had been wont to picture.

It was a cruel struggle, cruel to him; and the red flush of shame mantled in his brow as he thought of the binding words he had spoken to her, and the dishonour that must accrue to him in breaking them. There was not a man on the face of the earth whose sense of honour was more keen than Oswald Cray's, who was less capable of wilfully doing aught to tarnish it; and yet that tarnishing was thrust upon him. Any way, it seemed that a great stain must fall upon it. To take one to be his wife, whose father was a suspected man, would be a blot indeed; and to slip

through the words he had spoken, never more to take notice of her or them, was scarcely less so. He felt it keenly ; he, the man of unblemished conduct, and, it may be said, of unblemished heart.

But still he did not for a moment hesitate. Great as the pain was to himself, little as she, in her innocence, deserved that the slight should be inflicted on her, he never wavered in that which he knew must be. The only question that arose to him was, how it should be best done. Should he speak to her ?—or should he gradually drop all intimacy and let the fact become known to her in that way ? Which would be the kinder course ? That the separation would be productive of the utmost pain to her as to him, that she loved him with all the fervour of a first and pure attachment, he knew ; and he felt for her to his very heart's core. He hated himself for having to inflict this pain, and he heartily wished, as things had turned out, that he had never yielded to the pleasure of becoming intimate at Dr Davenal's. Well, which should be his course ? Oswald Cray sat over his fire one cold evening after business was over, and deliberated upon it. Some weeks had gone on then. He leaned his elbow on the arm of his chair, and bent his cheek on his hand, and gazed abstractedly on the blaze. He shrank from the very

idea of speaking to her. No formal engagement existed between them : it had been implied more than spoken ; and he would be scarcely justified in saying to her, " I cannot marry you now," considering that he had never in so many words asked her to marry him at all. She might regard it as a gratuitous insult.

But, putting that aside, he did not see his way clear to speak to her. What reason could he give for his withdrawal ? He could not set it down to his own caprice ; and he could not—no, he *could not*—put forth to her the plea of her father's misdoing. He began to think it might be better to maintain silence, and so let the past and its words die away. If ——

He was aroused from his train of thought by the entrance of a woman—a woman in a black bonnet and sleeves turned up to the elbow, with a rather crusty expression of face. This was Mrs Benn, the housekeeper, cleaner, cook of the house. It did not lie in Mrs Benn's province to wait on Mr Oswald Cray, or she would probably have attired herself more in accordance with her duty. It lay in her husband's, and he had been sent out this evening by Mr Oswald Cray on business connected with the firm. On cleaning days—and they occurred twice in the week—Mrs Benn was wont to descend in the

morning in the black bonnet, and keep it on until she went to bed. It was not worn as bonnets are worn usually ; the crown behind and the brim before ; but was perched right on the top of her head, brim downwards : and Mrs Benn was under a firm persuasion that this kept her hair and her cap free from the dust she was wont to raise in sweeping. She was about forty, but looked fifty, and her face had got a patch of black-lead upon it, and a nail had torn a rent in her check apron.

“Wouldn't you like the things taken away, sir?” she asked in a tone as crusty as her look. “I am waiting to wash 'em up.”

This recalled Oswald Cray's notice to the fact that the remains of his dinner were yet upon the table. He believed he had rung for them to be taken away when he turned to the fire ; and there he had sat with his back to them since, never noticing that nobody had come to do it. It was now a little past seven, and Mrs Benn had grown angry and indignant at the waiting.

“I declare I thought they had gone away,” he said. “I suppose the bell did not ring. I am sure I touched it.”

“No bell have rung at all,” returned Mrs Benn resentfully. “I stood down there with my hands

afore me till the clock had gone seven, and then I thought I'd come up and see what was keeping 'em. You haven't eat much this evening, sir," she added, looking at the dish of steak and the potatoes. "I don't think you have eat much lately. Don't you feel well?"

"Well! I am very well," he replied carelessly, rising from his chair and stretching himself. "Is Benn not back yet?"

"No, he is not back," she returned, her tone becoming rather an explosive one, boding no good for the absent Mr Benn. "He don't seem to hurry himself, *he* don't, though he knows if he didn't get back I should have to come up here : and very fit I be on my cleaning days to appear before a gentleman."

"Is it necessary to clean in a bonnet?" asked Oswald quietly.

"It's necessary to clean in something, sir, to protect one's head from the fluff and stuff that collects. One would wonder where it comes from, all in a week. I used to tie a apron over my cap, but it was always coming off, or else blowing its corners into the way of one's eyes."

Oswald laughed. He remembered the apron era, and the guy Mrs Benn looked. For twelve years had she and her husband been the servants of that

house. Formerly Mr Bracknell, an old bachelor, had lived in it, and Benn and his wife waited on him, as they now did on Mr Oswald Cray.

"Would you like tea this evening, sir?" she inquired. For sometimes Oswald took tea and sometimes he did not.

"Yes; if you bring it up directly. I am going out."

She went away with her tray of things. Down the first flight of stairs, past the offices, and down again to the kitchen. The ground floor of this house in Parliament Street was occupied by the offices of the firm, and partially so the floors above. Oswald Cray had two or three rooms for his own use; his sitting-room, not a very large one, being on the first floor.

His train of thought had been broken by the woman, and he did not recall it. He stepped into an adjoining apartment, lighted a shaded lamp, sat down, and began examining a drawing of some complicated plans. Pencil in hand, he was deep in the various mysteries pertaining to engineering, when he heard Mrs Benn and the tea-tray. He finished marking off certain lines and strokes on a blank sheet of paper—which he did after a queer fashion, his eyes fixed on the drawing, and his fingers only appearing to guide the pencil—before he went in.

He had not hurried himself, and the tea must be getting cold. Mrs Benn was in the habit of making it down stairs, so that he had no trouble. It was by no means a handsome tea equipage—partly belonging, in fact, to Mrs Benn herself. The black tea-pot had a chipped spout, and the black milk-jug had a fray on its handle, and the china tea-cup was cracked across. Oswald's china tea-service had been handsome once—or rather Mr Bracknell's, for it was to that gentleman the things in the house belonged; but Mrs Benn had what she herself called a "heavy hand at breakage," and two or three cups and saucers were all that remained. Oswald determined to buy himself a decent tea-set, but somehow he never thought of it, and the elegant equipage came up still.

He poured himself out a cup, stirred it, and then went for the sheet of paper on which he had been making the strokes and scrawls. Mrs Benn knew her master well. He had said he was going out, but he was just as likely to remain over these strokes all the evening as to go out; perhaps, even, in forgetfulness keep her tea-things up until ten o'clock, or until she went for them. Oswald Cray was one whose heart was in his profession, and work was more pleasant to him than idleness.

He was busy still over this paper, neglecting his tea, when Mrs Benn came in again. He thought she had come very soon for her tea-tray to-night. But she had not come for that.

"Here's company now, sir! A young lady wants to see you."

"A young lady!" repeated Oswald. "To see me?"

"Well, I suppose she's a young lady—from what one can see of her through her black veil; but she come to my kitchen bell only, when the knocker was a-staring her right in the face," returned Mrs Benn. "She asked for you, sir. I said, was it any message I could take up, but she says she wants to speak to you herself."

"You can show her up."

Mrs Benn accomplished this process in a summary manner. Going down the stairs to the hall where she had left the applicant, she briefly said to her, "You can go up. First door you come to that's open"—and then left the lady to find her way. Had her husband, Benn, been at home, he would have asked her what she meant by introducing a visitor in that fashion to Mr Oswald Cray; and he would probably have got for answer a sharp order to mind his own business. In point of fact, Mrs Benn, on those two dark interludes of her weekly existence,

cleaning days, had neither time nor temper to waste on superfluous ceremony.

Oswald Cray had bent over his paper again, attaching little importance to the advent of the visitor; he supposed it might be some messenger from one or other of the clerks. The footfall on the stairs was soft and light; Oswald's back was to the door, and his lines and marks were absorbing his attention.

"Mr Oswald Cray?"

It was a sweet and pleasant and sensible voice, with a Scotch accent very perceptible to English ears. It was the voice of a lady, and Oswald Cray started up hastily, pencil in hand.

A short, slight, very young-looking woman, with a fair face and blue eyes, stood before him. Strictly speaking, there was no beauty whatever in the face, but it was so fair, so frank, so honest, with its steady good sense and its calm blue eyes, that Oswald Cray warmed to it at once. She was dressed plainly in black, and she threw back her crape veil to speak—as most sensible women like to do. To Oswald's eyes, seeing her by that light, she looked about one or two and twenty, as she had to Mrs Benn: her light complexion, her small features, and her slight figure were all of that type that remain young a long

while. In his surprise he did not for the moment speak, and she repeated the words, not as a question this time—

“You are Mr Oswald Cray.”

“That is my name,” he answered, recovering his equanimity. “May I——”

“I come to you from my brother, Frank Allister,” she interrupted. “I am Jane Allister.”

She pronounced the name “Jean,” as she had in fact been christened, but it generally gets corrupted into Jane by English ears and English tongues. Oswald so interpreted it. His whole face lighted up with a smile of welcome; it may be said of recognition. He had heard so much of this good sister from his friend Frank Allister.

“I am so glad you have come to him!” he warmly exclaimed, taking her hand. “Frank has almost pined for you; but he did not expect you yet. I seem to know you quite well: he has talked to me of you so much.”

“Thank you; I’ll take it,” she said, in answer to the chair he offered. “And I will take off my fur,” she added, unwinding a boa from her neck, and untying her bonnet strings. “Your room feels very warm to one coming in from the keen air outside.”

There was something in her frank manners that

struck most pleasingly on the mind of Oswald. She sat there as confidingly in his room as though he had been her brother: a good, modest, single-minded woman, whom even a bad man could not do otherwise than respect.

"Yes, I came before Frank expected me," she said. "I did not think I could have come so soon; but my friends kindly released me. You know my situation—why I could not come to him before."

"I know that you are"—Oswald hesitated for a moment, and then went bravely on. Before that clear eye of plain good sense there was no need to mince the matter, and pretend ignorance.

"I know that you are companion-attendant to a lady. And that you could not leave her."

"I have been companion and maid to her all in one," said Miss Allister. "When I and Frank had to go out into the world and do the best we could for ourselves, I was obliged to look out for what I was most fitted for. Our dead mother's brother offered to help Frank, and he paid the premium with him to this house, and assisted him otherwise, and I was very glad it should be so——"

"You mean Mr Brown?" interrupted Oswald.

"Yes. He lived in London. My mother was English born and reared. He was a good friend to

us so long as he lived. It was necessary that I should go out; and a situation offered in a lady's family, Mrs Graham. She wanted some one who would be her companion, sit with her, read to her, some one well reared, of whom she might make an equal, but who would at the same time act as maid; and I took it. But perhaps you have heard all this from Frank?"

"No, not these past details. Though he has talked of you very much. He has told me"—Oswald broke into a frank smile as he said it—"that his sister Jane was worth her weight in gold."

"I should be sorry to think that most sisters are not worth as much as I am," she gravely answered. "I have but done my duty, so far as I could do it, and the worst of us ought to do no less. When Frank found I acted as maid to Mrs Graham, he was very much put out, and wanted me to give up the situation, and seek a different one. But I laughed at him for a proud boy, and I have stayed on until now. What am I the worse for it? I dressed her, and served her, and when of late years she got ill and helpless, I nursed and fed her. I had become so useful to her—I must say, so indispensable—that when news reached me of Frank's illness, I could not quit

her to come to him. I tried to see which way my duty lay ; to leave her for my sick brother, or to leave my brother to strangers, and stay with my dying and helpless friend and mistress. Every week we expected would be her last ; she has been slowly dying for these three months ; and I felt that it would be wrong to abandon her. That, you see, is why I could not come to Frank."

"Is she dead?" asked Oswald.

"Oh, yes. This mourning that I am wearing is for her. And as soon as it was possible after the funeral, I came away. We had a long and bad passage, two days, and I did not reach Frank until three o'clock this afternoon."

"You should have come by land," observed Oswald.

"Nay, but that would have cost more," she simply answered. "And I knew that Frank was better, so as to be in no vital hurry for my presence. I have come to you, sir, this evening to ask your opinion of his state. Will you be so kind as to give it me?"

"First of all will you permit me to invite you to take a cup of tea," replied Oswald, turning round to look at the tray, which was on the opposite side of the table, next the door.

"No, I thank you," she replied, "I gave Frank his tea before I came out, and took some with him."

But will you let me pour out a cup for you? I saw that I interrupted you."

Before Oswald could decline, she had taken her gloves off, and was round at the tray, putting it in order. That a bachelor had been doing the honours of the ceremony was only too apparent. The teapot was stuck on the side of the tray, spout forwards; the milk-jug was not on the tray at all, but ever so far away on the table. Jane Allister had put all this to rights in a twinkling, and was pouring the slop of cold tea out of his tea-cup into the basin.

"Not for me," said Oswald, feeling as if he had known her for years. "You are very kind, but I have taken all I wish."

"Nay, not kind at all," she said, looking at him with some surprise. "I'd have been glad to do it for you."

Oswald had risen, and she came back from the tea-tray, and stood by him on the hearth-rug. Her bonnet still untied, her gloves off, her face and attitude full of repose, she looked like one in her own home.

"You'll tell me freely what you think of Frank?"

There was not the slightest shade of doubt in her voice; she evidently expected that he would tell it her; tell it her freely, as she asked for it. She stood

with her fair face raised, her candid blue eyes thrown full up to his.

Oswald drew her chair forward for her, and took his own, pausing before he spoke. In good truth he scarcely now knew what was his opinion of Frank Allister. It was one of those cases where the patient seems at death's door, and then, to the surprise of all, the disease takes a sudden turn, and appears to be almost gone. In the previous month, October, Oswald Cray had believed that a few days must see the end of Frank Allister; this, the close of November, he was apparently getting well all one way.

"I do not quite know how to answer you," Oswald began. "Five or six weeks ago Frank was so ill that I did not think there remained the least chance for him, but he has changed in a wonderful manner. But for the deceitfulness that is so characteristic of the disease, I should believe him to be getting well. Remembering that, I can only look upon it as a false improvement."

Jane Allister paused. "I suppose there is no doubt that his symptoms are those of consumption?"

"None."

"And consumption, if it does come on, is rarely, if ever cured. Do you think it is?"

"Very rarely, I fear."

"But again, I have known patients who have displayed every symptom of consumption, have suffered much, and who have eventually got strong and hearty, and continued so."

"That is true," he assented. "There have been such instances. I wish I could satisfy you better, but indeed I do not know what to think. Mr Bracknell asked me a day or two ago how Allister was getting on, and I answered as I answer you—that I really could not tell him."

"When I reached my brother's to-day and saw how well he appeared to be, so different from what I had expected to find him, I could not help expressing my surprise," said Miss Allister. "Frank gaily told me that his illness and its supposed danger had been all a mistake, and he had taken a new lease of life. I did not know what to think, what to believe; and I determined to come here and ask your opinion. I could not, you know, ask you before him."

"And I cannot give you a decisive one," repeated Oswald. "I can only hope that this improvement may go on to a complete restoration; and I should think it, but for the treacherous nature of the disease. Frank does certainly appear wonderfully strong and well. Even the doctor cannot say that it will not end in recovery."

"Frank wrote me word that you had caused him to see one of the great London physicians, and that the opinion was unfavourable. But that was when he was at the worst. You have been truly kind to him, Mr Oswald Cray, and when I came here to-night I felt that I was coming to a friend."

"I should like to be your friend always," returned Oswald, in an unusual impulse. "I seem to have been so a long while, Frank has talked to me so much of you."

"Do you come to see him daily?"

"Not daily; but as often as I can. It is some distance from here."

"It is a long way. But I got misdirected."

"You surely did not walk?" exclaimed Oswald.

"To be sure I walked. How else should I come!"

"There are conveyances—cabs and omnibuses."

"But they cost money," she answered, with that frank, open plainness, which, in her, seemed so great a charm. "I am not come away to England devoid of means, but they will find plenty of outlets in necessary things, without being spent in superfluities. Any way, they must be made to last both for me and Frank, until I can leave him and go out again. I'd not speak of these things to you, Mr Oswald Cray, but that you must know all the particulars of our position."

She had risen as she spoke, and was now tying her bonnet strings. Oswald picked up a glove which she dropped.

"And now I'll wish you good-night," she continued, putting her hand frankly into his. "And I'd like to thank you with all my heart for what you have done for Frank; for the good friend you have been to him. You have brought to him help and comfort when there was nobody else in the world to bring it. I shall always thank you in my heart, Mr Oswald Cray."

Oswald laughed the words off, and attended her downstairs, catching up his hat as he went through the hall. Mrs Benn and her black bonnet came up the kitchen stairs.

"Good-night," repeated Jane Allister.

"I am going with you," said Oswald.

She resisted the suggestion at first, saying she could find her way back quite well; but Oswald quietly carried his point.

He closed the door behind him, and offered his arm. She took it at once, thanking him in a staid old-fashioned manner. Mrs Benn drew the door open and looked after them.

"Arm-in-arm!" ejaculated that lady. "And he bending of his head down to her to talk! Who on earth can she be?—coming after him to his house—

and stopping up there in the parlour—and keeping up of the tea-things! It looks uncommon like as if he had took on a sweetheart. Only——So it's you at last, is it, Joe Benn! And what do you mean by stopping out like this?"

The concluding sentences were addressed to a respectable-looking man who approached the door. It was Joseph Benn, her husband, and the faithful servant of the firm.

"I couldn't make more haste," he quietly answered.

"Not make more haste! Don't tell me. Mr Oswald Cray expected you were home an hour ago."

"Mr Oswald Cray will be quite satisfied that I have not wasted my time when I tell him where I've been. Is he upstairs?"

"No, he is not," she sharply answered. "Satisfied, indeed! Yes, he looked satisfied when he saw me going up to wait upon him in this guise, and to show in his company! And me waiting a good mortal hour for his dinner-things, which he forgot was up! which couldn't have happened if you'd been at your post to wait at table. You go and stop out again at his dinner-time, Joe Benn!"

Joe Benn made no rejoinder; experience had taught him that it was best not. He passed her, and she shut the door with a bang.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MORE INSTILLED DOUBT.

THE air was keen and frosty, and the flags of the streets were white and clean—not a common feature in November—as they walked forth. Oswald could but admire this straightforward Scotch girl, with her open speech, and her plain good sense. She was so young in appearance that he could only think of her as a girl, though she had herself reminded him that she was older than Frank. This, as he knew, must bring her to a year or two past thirty : and in steadiness of manner and solid independence she was two-and-forty.

Reared in her Highland home, in every comfort for the earlier years of her life, she had since had to buffet with the world. Her mother, a widow since Frank was two years old, had enjoyed a good income, but it died with her. The uncle in London

took Frank, who was then a youth ; and Jane had to seek a situation. It was not easy to find. For a governess she was not qualified, so many of what are called accomplishments are essential now-a-days, and Jane Allister had not learnt them. She had received a good education, but a strictly plain one.

Waiting and waiting ! No situation offered itself ; and when she heard of Mrs Graham's she was well-nigh wearied out with the worst of all weariness—that of long-continued disappointment, of hope deferred. But for that weariness she might not have accepted a place where she was to be personal attendant as well as companion. She took it, determined to do her duty in it, to make the very best of it ; and when her brother Frank wrote to her in a commotion from his distant home in London, where he was then with Bracknell and Street, she began by making the very best of it to him, gaily and lightly. Frank had the letter yet, in which she had jokingly called him—as she had just related to Mr Oswald Cray—a proud boy, and recommended him to “bring down” his notions. Frank Allister had never been reconciled to it yet. Jane had grown to like it ; and she had remained there all these years, conscientiously doing her duty.

"Have you lost a friend lately?" she inquired, in allusion to the crape band on Oswald's hat.

"Yes," he briefly answered, wincing at the question, could Jane Allister have seen it. All that past time of Lady Oswald's death, and the events attending it, caused an inward shiver whenever they were brought to his mind.

"It is a grievous thing to lose relatives when they are dear to us," remarked Jane. "There is an expression in your countenance at times, that tells me you have some source of sorrow."

Whatever the expression she had noticed on his countenance, she would have seen a very marked one now, had they been, as before, face to face near a table-lamp. The old haughty pride came into it, and his brow flushed blood-red. Oswald Cray was one of the very last to tolerate that his secret feelings should be observed or commented upon. As she spoke, it seemed to him as if the pain at his heart was read, his hopeless love for Sara Davenal laid bare.

"You are drawing a wrong inference, Miss Allister," he coldly said. "The friend I lost was neither near nor very dear to me. She was an old lady; a connection of my mother's family—Lady Oswald."

Jane marked the changed tone. She concluded

the loss *was* one of pain to him, though he did not choose to say so, and she gathered her deductions that he was a man of great reticence of feeling. That he was a brave man and a good man, one in every way worthy of trust, of esteem, she knew from Frank long ago.

"Why, Neal! Is it you?"

Mr Oswald Cray came to an abrupt halt in his surprise. Turning out of the door of a house that they were passing, so quickly as nearly to brush against him, was Dr Davenal's man-servant. Neal did not appear in the least taken to. He touched his hat and stood still with just the same equanimity, that he would have done had he been waiting there for the passing of Mr Oswald Cray.

"What has brought you to London, Neal? You have surely not left Dr Davenal?"

"Oh no, sir, I have not left. A brother of mine, sir, has returned to England after an absence from it of many years, and a little property of ours that couldn't be touched while he was away, is now being divided. I spoke to Dr Davenal, and he gave me leave to come."

"Have you been up long?"

"Only three days, sir."

"Are they all well at Hallingham?"

"Quite well, sir. Mr Cray hurt his arm as he was getting out of the doctor's carriage, and it was bound up for a week. But it is better."

"How did he manage that?"

"I don't think he knew, sir. His foot slipped as he was stepping out, and he swung round in some way, keeping hold of the carriage with his hand bent behind. It was rather a bad sprain."

"Miss Davenal is quite well?"

"Yes, sir. Miss Sara has had a cold lately, and is looking ill. The captain went abroad, sir, without coming to Hallingham, and they all felt it much."

Oswald bade the man good-night, and walked on. He did not care, in his fastidious sensitiveness, to hear the looks of Sara Davenal commented on. If she did look ill, was it for his, Oswald's, sake?—or was she haunted with that unhappy secret which Neal had once so darkly hinted at?

Neal stood within the shade of the house looking after Mr Oswald Cray, or rather after the young lady leaning on his arm. Neal was very curious as to this young lady, for young she looked in Neal's eyes. While apparently his whole attention was absorbed by his conversation with Mr Oswald Cray, he had been studying the face turned to him; a fair and sensible face, as Mr Neal could read, though less

good-looking than Miss Sara Davenal's. What with Neal's legitimate observation and his illegitimate ferreting habits, he had contrived to arrive at a very ingenious conjecture of the tacit relations which had existed between Mr Oswald Cray and Dr Davenal's daughter; and Neal had of late been entertaining a rather shrewd guess that Mr Oswald Cray intended those relations to cease. He judged by the fact that the gentleman had never once, since Lady Oswald's funeral, been inside the doctor's doors. A formal call and a left card during one of his visits to Halingham, had comprised all the notice taken. Tolerably safe appearances these, from which Neal drew his conclusions; and it perhaps may be pardoned one of Neal's conclusion-drawing mind, that he asked himself whether this young lady had superseded Miss Sara.

"It looks uncommonly like it," he repeated to himself, as his gaze followed them in the distance. "I should like to be certain, and to know who she is. She looks like a lady—and he'd not take up with any body that was not one. Suppose I just see where they go? I have nothing particular on my hands this evening."

Gingerly treading the streets, as one who knows he is bent upon some surreptitious expedition is apt

to tread them, Neal stepped along, keeping Mr Oswald Cray and his companion sufficiently in view not to lose them. After a sufficiently long walk, they entered a house on the confines of Chelsea, bordering upon Brompton; the middle one of a row of moderate-sized houses, with small gardens before the doors. Neal saw Mr Oswald Cray knock; and a young servant-maid admitted them.

But this left Neal as wise as before. He could see the house, could read the name of the Terrace, "Bangalore Terrace," in large black letters at either end; but this did not tell the name of the lady, or who she was; and Bangalore Terrace, though sufficiently respectable-looking, was certainly not the class of terrace to which it might be expected Mr Oswald Cray would go for a wife.

Neal might have remained in his ignorance until now, but for a fortunate accident. He was taking a last look at the house ere he turned away, at the light which shone behind the blinds of the first-floor windows, when the same servant who had opened the door came running out, her bonnet just perched on her head, its strings flying, and a jug and latch-key in her hand. As she passed Neal, the unsecured bonnet flew off, and Neal gallantly picked it up.

"I'm sure I'm much obliged to you, sir," she said, civilly. "Nasty tilting things these new-fangled bonnets be! One doesn't know whether to fix 'em a-top of the back hair or under it."

"Can you tell me where a Miss— Miss—— It is very unfortunate," broke off Neal in a tone of vexation. "I am in search of a young lady on a little matter of business, and I have forgotten her number. I think she lives at number five, but I am not sure."

"Number five's our house," said the girl, falling readily into the trap. "There ain't no young lady living there. There's three young ladies at number six, sir; perhaps it's one o' them."

"No young lady living at number five?" repeated Neal.

"No, there isn't. There's only my missis, and me, and two sons, and the gentleman what's ill on the first-floor. But perhaps you mean the sick gentleman's sister?" she added, the thought striking her. "She came to our house to-day, after a long journey all the way from Scotland, and she's going to stop with him."

Neal hardly thought this could apply. The young lady did not look as though she had just come off a long journey. "I don't know," said he. "What is her name?"

"Her name's the same as her brother's—Allister. If you'd been here two minutes sooner, sir, you might have seen her, for she's just come in with Mr Oswald Cray. He's a gentleman who comes to see Mr Allister."

"Allister! The name was conclusive without the other testimony. Neal had once heard Mr Oswald Cray describe his friend Allister's symptoms to Dr Davenal. This fair girl with the pleasant face was Miss Allister, then!"

"Ah, it's not the same," said he cautiously. "I must come down by daylight and look out. Good-night, young woman; I am sorry to have detained you," he said as he walked away.

"Miss Allister!" repeated Neal to himself. "And so the brother's not dead yet! I remember Mr Oswald Cray saying he could not live a week, and that's three months ago."

Frank Allister was sitting between the fire and the table, reading by the light of the lamp, when they entered. He was slight and short, with a fair skin like his sister's, and a long thin neck. The room was very small, as the drawing-rooms (as they are called) in these unpretending suburban houses mostly are. What with the smallness of the room and the heavy closeness of the Brompton air, Jane

Allister had felt stifled ever since she arrived that day. Frank, without rising from his seat, turned round and held his thin white fingers towards Oswald Cray, who grasped them.

"Jane, where have you been? I fancied you went out for but a few minutes' walk."

"I thought I would go as far as Mr Oswald Cray's, Frank, and thank him for his attention to you," was her answer. "He has been so kind as to walk back with me."

"But how did you find your way," cried Frank, wonderingly.

"I inquired. But I suppose I was stupid at understanding, for I went out of my way. What a busy place London is! I should get bewildered if I lived in it long."

Oswald Cray laughed. "It would be just the contrary, Miss Allister. The longer you lived in it the less bewildered you would be."

"Ah, yes," she answered; "use reconciles us to most things."

She had laid her bonnet and black shawl on a chair, and was going noiselessly from one part of the room to another, putting in order things that Frank had disturbed since her departure. He had wanted a particular book, and to get it had displaced two

whole shelves of the cheffonier. The coal-box stood in the middle of the room, and a fancy china ink-stand, the centre ornament of the cheffonier, lay on a chair. But the room, in its present general neatness and order, looked different from anything Oswald had ever seen it. Sometimes there had not been, as the saying runs, a place to sit upon. Frank ill, perhaps careless, had paid little heed to how his room went, and his landlady and his landlady's young maid had not much bestirred themselves in the matter. When Jane arrived she had taken in all the discomfort at the first glance, and did not sit down until it was remedied. Frank's bedchamber was at the back, opening from it, and there was a small room, a closet, in fact, at the bend of the stairs, which was to be Jane's.

Oswald followed her with his eyes, as she moved about in her simple usefulness. Perhaps he wished that he had such a sister to make his home a prettier place than it was made by Mrs Benn. She was very small in figure, and the folds of her soft black dress scarcely added to its fulness. Her light hair was carried rather low on the cheeks, and twisted into a coil on her neck behind. Without her out-door things she looked, if anything, younger than she did in them.

"And so you went to Mr Oswald Cray's, inquiring your way!" cried Frank. "I say, young lady, that's not the fashion of doing things in London."

"May be not," answered Jane. "I daresay I and London shall not agree in our notions of fashion. Have you taken your milk, Frank?"

"I should think so. It was smoked again."

"Smoked?" cried Jane, turning round and looking at him.

"It generally is smoked," continued Frank. "I think their saucepans down-stairs must be constructed on the plan of letting the smoke in."

Jane said no more. She inwardly resolved that neither Frank's milk nor anything else that he took should be smoked in future.

"Why don't you sit down, Oswald. Are you afraid of Jane?"

"Not very much," Oswald answered, looking round at her with a smile. "The fact is, Frank, I have some work to do at home to-night, and must get back."

"Plans to go over?"

"That and other things."

"I shall soon be well enough to come out again and go to work," resumed Frank Allister; and his

confident tone proved how firm was his belief in his own words. "Will Bracknell and Street take me on again?"

"I think you will soon be out if you go on improving at this rate," answered Oswald, ignoring the last portion of Frank's words. "You look better this evening than you have looked yet."

"Oh, I am all right. But, of course, I look better now Jane's here. Nearly the first thing she did was to part and brush my hair, and make me put on a clean collar. Only fancy her coming upon me to-day without warning! When the girl came up to say there was a lady at the door in a cab for Mr Allister, I thought of anybody rather than Jane."

Oswald Cray wished them good-night, and walked leisurely home. He really had some work to do; but he could have remained longer with them, only that he thought they might prefer to be alone on this the first evening of the sister's arrival. They had been apart for so many years.

Oswald let himself in with his latch-key. It must be supposed that Mrs Benn heard him; for she came running up the kitchen stairs, and held out something to him under the light of the hall lamp. It appeared to be a piece of narrow black ribbon, about a third of a yard in length.

"When I had got the tea-tray down in the kitchen, sir, I found this a-hanging to it. I suppose the young lady that was with you up-stairs left it here."

There was little doubt that Jane had left it. A wrist-ribbon probably, inadvertently untied in pulling off her glove. Oswald looked at the woman—at her crusty face, where the pert curiosity induced by the visit was not yet subdued. A curiosity he judged it well to satisfy.

"Did you know who that lady was, Mrs Benn?"

"No, sir."

"It was poor Mr Allister's sister. She has come all the way from Scotland to nurse him."

The crustiness disappeared; the face lighted up with a better feeling. Mr Allister had been a favourite of Mrs Benn's, and if she could be sorry for anybody's illness she was sorry for his.

"Mr Allister's sister! If I had but known it sir! What a pleasant-speaking young lady she is."

Following his wife up the kitchen stairs, had come Benn. He waited until this colloquy was over, and then began to speak on his own account.

"A gentleman is waiting for you in your sitting-room, sir."

"Who is it?" asked Oswald.

"I think he's a stranger, sir. I don't remember to have seen him before."

Oswald proceeded up-stairs. Standing at the side of the room, facing the door as he opened it, his gloves on and his hat in his hand, was Neal. And so much like a gentleman did he really look, that Mr Joseph Benn's mistake was a perfectly natural one.

"I have taken the liberty of intruding upon you, sir, and of asking to wait until you returned, to inquire whether I can convey anything for you to Hallingham. You had hardly left me, sir, in the street, when I remembered how very remiss it was in me not to ask you. Unless I have a letter from the doctor to-morrow morning, according me a day or two's more grace, which I have written for, I shall leave to-morrow evening. If I can do anything there for you, sir, or be of use to you in any way, you may command me."

"Thank you, Neal ; there's nothing I want done. I expect to go down myself next week. Come to the fire and warm yourself this cold night. Sit down."

Neal came forward nearer the fire ; but he did not avail himself of the invitation to sit. Oswald inquired if he would like some refreshment, but he declined.

"Have they heard from Captain Davenal yet, do you know?" Oswald asked.

"I think not, sir. I believe they were expecting letters from Malta when I left."

"I wish he could have gone down for a short while. I am sure the doctor felt it."

"There's no doubt he did, sir, very much," returned Neal, with warm sympathy in his low, respectful tone. "I grieve to say, sir, that the doctor appears to be very much changed. He is more like one suffering from some inward painful illness than anything else."

"Of body or of mind?" involuntarily asked Oswald, speaking on the moment's impulse. And however he may have regretted the question, he could not recall it.

"I should say of mind, sir. Since the night of—of Lady Oswald's death, he has been a changed man."

Mr Oswald Cray made no answer whatever to the allusion; he evidently declined to enter upon that unsatisfactory topic. Neal resumed.

"There are going to be changes in our house, sir; it is to be conducted with more regard to economy. Watton is to leave, and I am not sure but I am also. Miss Davenal does not wish any changes to be made, but the doctor says it is necessary."

"On the score of economy?"

"Yes, sir, on the score of economy. I heard him talking of it to Miss Sara; he said if the present rate of expense was to go on, together with the heavy sum that must now go from him yearly as hush-money, he should not keep his head above water. Miss Davenal, who does not understand why any retrenchment should be made, opposes it entirely."

Every fibre in Oswald Cray's heart resented the words—he could not bear that such should be spoken out boldly to him, no matter what their truth might be. Neal's innocent eyes noted the sudden flush upon his face.

"I think you must be mistaken, Neal. Hush-money! Dr Davenal would scarcely use the term to his daughter."

"Not that precise term, perhaps, sir, but certainly something equivalent to it. There is a rumour in the town, sir, that he intends to resign to the relatives the legacy left to him by my lady, or part of it."

"Indeed!"

"People have talked a great deal, I fancy, sir, and it has reached the doctor's ears. Perhaps, sir, if I may venture to say it to you, he may be *afraid* to

keep it. The injustice of the bequest might lead to some investigation which—which would be inconvenient to Dr Davenal.”

“Neal, I’d rather not enter upon these topics,” said Oswald, in a clear, resolute tone. “Things which appear dubious to us may be explainable by Dr Davenal. At any rate, it is neither your business nor mine.”

And by those firm words Neal knew that Mr Oswald Cray had, so to say, washed his hands of the affair, and did not mean to take it up in any way. Neal’s hopes had tended to the contrary, and it was a little check-mate.

“I thought I would presume to ask you, sir, whether you might not be soon requiring a personal attendant,” he resumed, sliding easily out of his disappointment, and giving no token of it. “Should I be leaving the doctor, it would afford me greater pleasure to serve you, sir, than any one else, now my late lady’s gone.”

Oswald laughed—he could not help it. “A valet for me, Neal? No, that would never do under present circumstances. You will be at no fault for a good place, rely upon it, should you leave Dr Davenal. The good places will be only too glad to contend for you.”

Neal did not dispute the assertion. What his precise motive might have been for wishing to serve Mr Oswald Cray, when he could no doubt dispose of himself so much more advantageously, was best known to himself. He made his adieu in his usual quiet and respectful fashion, and took his departure, leaving Oswald Cray to the reminiscences of the interview. Oswald sat over the fire as oblivious of the work he had to do, as he had been of the dinner-things earlier in the evening. Will it be believed that the hint dropped by Neal—that Dr Davenal might be giving up the money because he dared not risk the danger of any investigation—was grating unpleasantly on the brain of Oswald? To do Neal justice so far, he himself fully believed that such was the motive of Dr Davenal, and he had spoken for once with an earnest truthfulness that is never without its weight.

It was unfortunate that this aspect of the affair should have been the first given to Oswald Cray. Had he simply heard that Dr Davenal was declining the bequest in his generous consideration for the Stephensons, it might perhaps have shaken his doubts of that other dark story, since the only motive the doctor could possibly have had throughout (as Oswald's mind had argued), was the acquire-

ment of the money. But if he was declining the money through fear, it only served to make these doubts the greater. It was most unfortunate, I say, that this aspect of the affair should have been imparted to him; for we all know how little, how very little, will serve to strengthen suspicions once aroused.

He sat on with his unhappy thoughts far into the night, the image of Sara Davenal ever before him. Never had his love for her been more ardently tender, never had the cruelty of their obligatory separation been so keenly present to his soul.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN INCLEMENT AFTERNOON.

DECEMBER came in with a drizzling rain, which lasted a day or two. A cold, bleak, windy rain, rendering out-door life miserable. As Sara Davenal sat at her chamber window, looking into the street, the shivering and uncomfortable appearance presented by the few passers-by might have excited her compassion.

But it did not. Truth to say, Sara Davenal had too much need of compassion herself just now, to waste it upon street passengers. The greatest blight that can possibly fall upon the inward life of a woman, had fallen upon hers. Oswald Cray was faithless. She knew not how, she knew not why; she only judged by his conduct that it must be so. He had been two or three times to Hallingham, and had shunned her; had shunned them altogether.

There could be no better proof. One of the visits he had remained three days ; therefore he had not want of time to plead as his excuse. He had called at the door, inquired for Miss Davenal, and upon Neal's answering that Miss Davenal was out, he had handed in cards. For Sara he had not asked at all, and he had not been near the house since.

Sara could do nothing. She could only accept this change in him and bear it in silence. Had she been asked to pin her faith on the truth and honour of any living man, she would have pinned it on Oswald Cray's. Not because she loved him, not because it was to her his allegiance was certainly due, but because she believed him to be, of all others, the very soul of chivalrous integrity. But, that he had changed to her, there could not be a shadow of doubt : his conduct proved it. He had silently broken off all relations with her, and given no token of what his motive could be.

That some cause, just or unjust, had led to it, she yet did him the justice to believe : he was the last man so to act from caprice, or from a totally unworthy motive. And she knew he had loved her. In vain she asked herself what this cause could be ; but there were moments when a doubt of whether the terrible secret, which had been imparted that

past night to Dr Davenal, could have become known to Oswald Cray. If so—why, then, in his high honour, his sensitive pride, he had perhaps decided that she was no fit wife for him. And Sara could not say that he had so decided unjustifiably. Whatever the cause, they were separated.

They were separated. And the sunshine of her life was over. Oh, the bitter anguish that it cost! There is no pain, no anguish, that this world and its many troubles can bring, like unto it—the finding one false, upon whom love, in all the freshness of its first feeling, has been lavished. The bright green of life's verdure is gone; the rich blue has faded from the wintry sky.

Sara said nothing, but the doctor spoke openly of the strange conduct of Mr Oswald Cray.

"I know nothing that can have offended him," he observed. "Unless he has chosen to take umbrage at the money's having been left to me."

"Nonsense," said Miss Davenal; "it's not that. Mr Oswald Cray did not want the money for himself; would not, it is said, have accepted it. It is not that."

And "It is not that," echoed Sarah Davenal's heart.

"What else is it, then?" said the doctor. "No-

body in this house has done anything to offend him. *You* have not, I suppose, Sara"—suddenly turning upon her, as a faint doubt flashed into his mind, never before admitted to it.

The question brought to her she knew not what of emotion. She answered it with an outward appearance of calmness, save for the burning red that dyed her face.

"Nothing, papa. The last time I spoke to Mr Oswald Cray was the night of the accident. We parted quite good friends—as we always had parted."

And the sweet words whispered by Oswald rose up before her as she spoke. What a contrast! that time and this!

"Just so," replied the doctor. "There has been nothing whatever to cause this coolness on his part, except the business of the money. Well, as I give it back to the family, perhaps my gentleman will come round. Rely upon it, that pride of his has been touched in some manner or other."

But the weeks had gone on, and December was in, and the gentleman had not "come round" yet. Sara Davenal sat at her bed-room window, all her shivering misery only too palpably present to her, as she watched the cold rain falling on the wet streets, in the gloomy twilight of the afternoon.

She saw Roger bring the carriage round. She saw her father go out from the house and step into it. It was the open carriage, but the head was up, and Roger and his master were sheltered from the rain. It was not the usual hour of Dr Davenal's going out, but the bad day had kept patients from calling on him, and a message had just been delivered saying that a lady whom he attended, Mrs Scott, was worse.

Sara heard the house clock strike four, and the lamps were already lighted in the streets. Night was coming on earlier than usual. The gleaming of the pools of water in the rays of the gas lamps did not tend to add to the cheerfulness of the scene; and Sara, with a shiver that she could not suppress, quitted her room and went down-stairs.

The blaze and warmth of the dining-room, as seen through the open door, was a welcome sight. She went in, and knelt down before the fire on the hearth-rug, and laid her aching head for shelter against the side of the marble mantle-piece, and stayed there until disturbed by the entrance of Miss Davenal.

"Neal's come home," announced Miss Davenal.

"Is he?" apathetically answered Sara.

"I saw him go by with his portmanteau. What

are you down there for, Sara, roasting your face? Have you no regard for your complexion?"

"I am not roasting it, aunt. My face is quite in the shade."

"But you are roasting it. What's the use of telling me that? Had I allowed the fire to burn my face at your age, do you suppose I should have retained any delicacy of skin? Get up from the fire."

Sara rose wearily. She sat down in a chair opposite to the one her aunt had taken, and let her hands fall listlessly in her lap.

"Have any patients been here this afternoon?"

"I think not, Aunt Bettina. I suppose it was too wet for them to come out."

"Have you been drawing?"

"Not this gloomy day. I like a good light for it."

"It strikes me you have become very idle lately, Miss Sara Davenal! Do you think that time was bestowed upon us to be wasted?"

A faint blush rose to Sara's cheek. In these, the early days of her bitter sorrow, she feared she had been idle. What with the shock brought upon her by that ominous secret, and the cruel pain caused by the falsity of Oswald Cray, her tribulation had been well-nigh greater than she could bear.

"Ring the bell," said Miss Davenal.

Sara rose from her chair and rang it. It was answered by Jessy.

"Tell Neal I shall be glad to see him."

Neal appeared in answer to the summons. His London journey had been prolonged by the permission of the doctor, and he had but now returned. In he came, just the same as usual, his white neck-tie spotless, his black clothes without a crease.

"So you are back, Neal," said Miss Davenal. "I am very glad to see you. And pray have you arranged all your business satisfactorily?—secured your share of the money?"

"Entirely so, thank you, ma'am," replied Neal, advancing nearer to his mistress that he might be heard. "I am pleased to find all well at home, ma'am."

"You have been away longer than you intended to be, Neal."

"Yes, ma'am. I wrote to my master stating why it was necessary that I should, if possible, prolong my stay, and he kindly permitted it. I saw Mr Oswald Cray, ma'am, while I was in London," Neal added as a gratuitous piece of information.

"You did what?" asked Miss Davenal, while Sara turned and stood with her back to them, looking at the fire.

"I saw Mr Oswald Cray, ma'am."

"Oh, indeed. And where did you see him?"

"I met him one night in London, ma'am. He was walking with a young lady."

"Saw him walking at night with a young lady?" repeated Miss Bettina, in rather a snappish tone—for as a general rule she did not approve of young ladies and gentlemen walking together, especially at night.

"She seemed a very nice young lady, ma'am, young and pretty," continued Neal, who was getting a little exasperated at the face of Miss Sara Davenal being hidden from his view. "I believe it was Miss Allister, the sister of a gentleman with whom Mr Oswald Cray is very intimate."

"Well, I am glad you are back, Neal," concluded Miss Davenal. "Things have gone all at sixes and sevens without you."

Neal retired. And Sara, in her still attitude before the fire, repeated the words over and over again to her beating heart. A lady young and pretty! walking with him in the evening hours—the sister of the friend with whom he was so intimate! She laid her hand upon her bosom, if that might still the tumult within, in all the sickness of incipient jealousy. Until that moment

Sara Davenal had never known how she had clung to hope in her heart of hearts. While saying to herself, he is lost to me for ever, this under-current of hope had been ever ready to breathe a whisper that the cloud might sometime be cleared up, that he might return. Now the scales were rudely torn from her eyes, and reason suggested that his slighting treatment of her might proceed from a different cause than any she had ever glanced at.

"What was it Neal said, Sara? That the pretty lady walking with Oswald Cray was somebody's sister?"

Sara turned in her pain to answer her aunt. "Mr Allister's sister, he said."

"Who's Mr Allister?"

"A sick gentleman who used to be at Bracknell and Street's. I remember that night of the railway accident, Mr Oswald Cray was obliged to return to town because he had promised to spend—to spend the Sunday with him."

An idea darting into her brain had caused her to hesitate. Had Oswald Cray's anxiety to return to town been prompted by the wish to be with the sister, as well as the brother? Sara felt her brow turn moist and cold.

"Young and pretty!" repeated Miss Davenal.

"Who knows but they may be engaged? Ah! it's Caroline who should have had Oswald Cray."

Meanwhile Dr Davenal had been driven to the house of Mrs Scott. It was not very far from his own home, about two streets only. Time had been, and not so far back, when Dr Davenal would not have thought of ordering his carriage for so short a distance, would have braved the inclemencies of the weather, the drifting rain, the cutting wind, and walked it. But the doctor had been growing ill both in body and mind; since the night of that fatal revelation, whatever it may have been, he seemed to have become in feelings like an old man, needing all the care and help of one. As he had looked from his window that afternoon, a sort of shudder at the out-door weather came over him; a feeling as if he could not and ought not to venture out in it. And he told Roger to bring round the carriage.

He stepped out of the carriage and entered Mrs Scott's, leaving Roger snugly ensconced under the shelter of the head and the horses steaming in the rain. But when the doctor reached his patient's bed, he found her so considerably and alarmingly worse that he could not yet think of leaving her. She was a great and real sufferer; not as poor Lady Oswald had been, an imaginary one; and in the last

week or two her symptoms had assumed a dangerous character. The doctor thought of Roger and his horses, and went down.

"I shall not be ready to come home this hour, Roger. Better go back and put the horses up. You can come for me at five."

So Roger, nothing loath, turned his horses round and went home. And Dr Davenal, with another shudder, and a very perceptible one, hastened indoors from the beating rain.

"What's the matter with me this afternoon?" he asked, half angry that any such sort of sensation should come over him.

Is the body at times more sensitive to outward influences than it is at others, rendering it susceptible to take any ill that may be abroad? Is it more liable to cold, to fever, to other ailments? Or can it be that the mind has so great an influence over the body that the very fact of dreading these ills predisposes us to take them? If ever Dr Davenal sensibly shrunk from an encounter with the outdoor weather, it was on that afternoon. He could not remember so to have shrunk from it in all his life.

Mrs Scott's room was hot. The fire was large, every breath of air excluded, and two large gas

burners flamed away, adding to the heat. As Dr Davenal sat there he became first at ease in the genial warmth, then hot, and subsequently as moist as though he were breathing the atmosphere of a baker's oven. He had had many a battle with this same Mrs Scott over the heated rooms she loved to indulge in, but he had not conquered yet.

It was not much above half-past four when the doctor was beckoned out of the room. He was wanted down-stairs. There stood Julius Wild, and Mr Julius Wild was in as white a heat with running, as Dr Davenal was with that pernicious atmosphere above.

"I have been about everywhere, sir, trying to find you," he began, out of breath. "At last I thought myself of asking your coachman at the stables if he knew, and he said you were at Mrs Scott's. You are wanted in the accident-ward, sir, as quick as you can get there."

"What has come in?" inquired Dr Davenal.

"A young man fell on his head from the very top of that scaffolding in High Street, sir. It is a dreadful case, and the house surgeon does not think he can be saved, even with the operation. The top of the head is crushed in. Mr Berry and Dr Ford and some more are there, but they wish for you."

Dr Davenal did not delay a moment. In a case of real necessity he threw aside all thought of precaution for himself. If human skill could save the life of this poor young man, he knew that his could; and he knew that perhaps his was the only hand in Hallingham which could successfully carry through the critical and delicate operation he suspected must be performed.

He had no great-coat with him, and he started off at once with Julius Wild, heated as he was. The rain beat against him in a torrent, for it poured now; the wind whirled itself in eddies about his person. No umbrella could live in it; one which the doctor had borrowed from the hall of Mrs Scott was turned inside out ere he had taken many steps.

"A rough night, sir," remarked the young embryo surgeon, as he kept by his side.

"It is that," said Dr Davenal.

Away they splashed through the muddy pools in the streets. It was quite dark now, with the unusually gloomy evening, and the gas lamps only served to mislead their eyesight in the haste they had to make. There could be no waiting to pick the way. The infirmary was at a considerable distance from Mrs Scott's, and ere they reached it the cold had struck to one of them. The one was not Julius Wild.

When they came in view of the Infirmary, Julius Wild ran forward to give notice that the doctor was approaching. Two or three of the medical men were in the great hall looking out for him ; Mark Cray was one of them. The news of the accident had travelled in the town, and the surgeons attached to the Infirmary were collecting there.

"We began to despair of you," cried Dr Ford, "and there's no time to be lost. I was just recommending Mr Cray to be the one to officiate."

Dr Davenal turned his eye with an eagle glance on Mark Cray ere the words had well left Dr Ford's lips. The look, the warning conveyed in it, was involuntary. Had Mark actually acceded to the recommendation, the look could scarcely have been sterner. Mark coloured under it, and his thoughts went back to Lady Oswald. Never, in Dr Davenal's presence, must he attempt to try his skill again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LAST MEETING.

THE night's work told on Dr Davenal. The soaking rain, the chilling wind, had struck inwards the perspiration which Mrs Scott's heated room had induced. On the next day he was visibly ill. Sara noticed it, and begged him not to go out.

"Not go out, child? I must go out."

"But you are not in a state for it. I am sure you are very ill."

"I caught cold last night; that's what it is. It will go off in a day or two."

"Yes, if you will lie by and nurse yourself. Not if you go out to make it worse."

"I have never lain by in all my life, Sara. A doctor has no time for it. What would become of my patients?"

He went out to his carriage, then waiting for him.

The close carriage. Bright as the day was—for the weather had changed—it was the close carriage that had been ordered round by the doctor.

“Is master ill, I wonder?” thought Roger, when he found it was only to pay the daily round of near visits.

As the doctor went out at the gate, it happened that Oswald Cray was passing. And Mr Oswald Cray quite started when he saw Dr Davenal, the change in him was so great.

It was impossible for either of them to pass the other, had they so wished it, without being guilty of absolute rudeness, and they stopped simultaneously.

“You are ill, Dr Davenal?” exclaimed Oswald, speaking impulsively.

“Middling. I have got a cold hanging about me. We have had some bad weather here.”

It cannot be denied that Dr Davenal’s tone and manner betrayed a coldness never yet offered to Oswald Cray. Generous man though he was by nature, as little prone to take offence as most people, he did think that Oswald Cray’s slighting conduct had been unjustifiable, and he could not help showing his sense of it.

They stood a moment in silence, Oswald marking the ravages illness or something else had made on

the doctor's face and form. His figure was drooping now, his face was careworn ; but the sickness looked to be of mind, more than of body. Unfortunately those miserable suspicions instilled into Oswald Cray's brain arose now with redoubled force, and a question suggested itself—could anything save remorse change a man as he had changed, in the short space of time ?

“ You are a stranger now, Mr Oswald Cray. What has kept you from us ? ”

“ The last time I called you were all out, ” he answered, somewhat evasively.

“ And you could not call again ! As you please, of course, ” continued the doctor, as Oswald's face took a somewhat repellant turn, and the Oswald pride became rather too conspicuous. “ I had wished to say a word or two to you with regard to the will made by Lady Oswald ; but perhaps you do not care to hear it. ”

“ Anything that you, or I, or any one else can say, will not alter the will, Dr Davenal. And it does not in the least concern me. ”

“ But I think you are resenting it in your heart, for all that. ”

Ah, what cross-purposes they were at ! Oswald had not resented that ; and all his fiery pride rose

up to boiling heat at being accused of it. He had deemed that to make Dr Davenal the inheritor was unjust to the nephews of Lady Oswald, and he had felt for them; but he had not *resented* it, even at heart. He spoke the literal truth when he said it was a matter that did not concern him. If the heavy cloud of misapprehension between them, could not have cleared itself away!

"Will you be kind enough to understand me once for all, Dr Davenal?" he haughtily said. "Lady Oswald's money, either before her death or after it, never was, nor could be, any concern of mine. I do not claim a right to give so much as an opinion upon her acts in regard to it; in fact I have no such right. Had she chosen to fling the money into the sea, to benefit nobody, she might have done so, for any wish of mine upon the point. I felt a passing sorrow for the Stephensons when I saw their disappointment, but I did not permit myself to judge so far as to say that Lady Oswald had done wrong. It was no affair of mine," he emphatically added, "and I did not make it one."

In spite of his impressive denial, Dr Davenal did not believe him. Whence, else, the haughty resentment that shone forth from every line of his features? Whence, else, his studied absence from the house,

his altogether slighting conduct? Dr Davenal made one more effort at concession, at subduing his unfounded prejudices.

"I can assure you I resented the will—if I may so say it. I resented it for the Stephensons' sake, and felt myself a pitiful usurper. Nothing would have induced me to accept that money, Mr Oswald Cray; and steps are being taken to refund it, every shilling, to the Stephensons."

"Ah," remarked Oswald, "I heard something of that. Had it been willed to me I should have done the same."

He held himself rigidly erect as he said it. There was no unbending of the hard brow, there was no faint smile to break the haughty curve of the lip. That poisonous hint dropped by Neal—that the money was about to be restored through *fear*—was uncomfortably present to Oswald then. Dr Davenal saw that the resentment, whatever its cause, was immovable, and he stepped into his carriage without shaking hands.

"Good morning to you, Mr Oswald Cray."

And then the reaction set in, in Oswald Cray's mind, and he began to blush for his discourtesy. The care-worn face, the feeble form, haunted him throughout the day, and he began to ask himself,

what if all his premises were wrong—if appearances and Neal's tale had been deceitful—if he had done the doctor grievous ill in his heart? It was but the reaction, I say, the repentance arising from his own haughty discourtesy, which he felt had been more offensively palpable than it need have been; but it clung to him for hours, haunting him in all the business that he had to transact.

It was somewhat strange, that just when this new feeling was upon him he should encounter Sara Davenal. They met in a lonely place—the once-famed grave-yard at the back of the Abbey.

His business for the day over, Oswald Cray was going to pay a visit to Mark and his wife. He was nearer the back of the Abbey than the front, and, ignoring ceremony, intended to enter by the small grated door, a relic of the old Abbey, which divided the grave-yard from one of the long Abbey passages. In passing the tombstone already mentioned, Oswald turned his eyes down upon it: in the bright moonlight—for never had the moon been brighter—he could almost trace the letters: the next moment, a noise in front attracted his attention—the closing of the grated door. There stood Sara Davenal. She had stayed with Mrs Cray later than she intended, and was hastening home to dinner: in leaving

the Abbey by this back entrance, a few minutes of the road were saved.

They met face to face. Sara's heart stood still, and her countenance changed from white to red with emotion. And Oswald?—all the love that he had been endeavouring to suppress returned in its deepest force.

Ah, it is of no use! Try as we may, we cannot evade the laws of nature; we cannot bend them to our own will. In spite of the previous resolutions of weeks to forget her, Oswald Cray stood there knowing that he loved her above everything on earth.

“How are you, Sara?”

He put out his hand to her in all calm self-possession; he spoke the salutation with quiet equanimity; but as Sara looked in his face, she knew that his agitation was not in reality less than hers. She said a few confused words in explanation of her being there at that hour and alone. On calling that afternoon, she had found Caroline not well, and had stayed with her to the last moment, as Mark was in the country.

Then for a whole minute there was a silence. Perhaps neither *could* speak. Sara put an end to it by turning towards the gate.

"You will let me see you home, as you are alone?"

"No, thank you," she answered. "There is nothing to hurt me. It is as light as day."

He did not press it. He seemed half paralysed with indecision. Sara wished him good night, and he responded to it, and once more shook hands, all mechanically.

But as she was going through the gate, she turned to speak, a question having occurred to her. One moment longer, and he had arrested her progress.

"There are two or three books at our house belonging to you," she said. "What is to be done with them? Shall they be sent to the Apple Tree?"

He caught her hands; he drew her from the gate into the bright moonlight. He could not let her go without a word of explanation; the cruelty of visiting upon her her father's sin was very present to him then.

"Are we to part thus for ever, Sara?"

Surely that question was cruel! It was not she who had instituted the parting; it was himself. She did not so much as know its cause.

"May we not meet once in a way, as friends?" he continued. "I dare not ask for more now."

That he loved her still was all too evident. And Sara took courage to gasp forth a question. In these

moments of agitation the cold conventionalities of the world are sometimes set aside.

"What has been the matter? How have we offended you?"

"You have not offended me," he answered, his agitation almost irrepressible. "I love you more than I ever did; this one moment of meeting has proved it to me. I could lay down my life for you, Sara; I could sacrifice all, save honour, for you. And you? You have not changed?—you love me still?"

"Yes," she gasped, unable to deny the truth, too miserable to care to suppress it.

"And yet we must part! we must go forth on our separate paths, striving to forget. But when our lives shall end, Sara, we shall neither of us have loved another as we love now."

Her very heart seemed to shiver; the fiat was all too plainly expressed. But she stood there quietly, waiting for more, her hand in his.

"I would have forfeited half my future life, I would have given all its benefits to be able to call you mine. The blow upon me has been very bitter."

"What blow?" she murmured.

"I cannot tell it you," he cried, after a struggle.

"Not to you can I speak of it."

"But you must," she rejoined, the words breaking from her in her agony. "You have said too much, or too little."

"I have—Heaven help me! Can you not guess what it is that has caused this?"

"N—o," she faltered. But even as the word left her lips there rose up before her the secret of that dreadful night—with the suspicion that Oswald had in some unaccountable manner become cognisant of it.

"I loved you as I believe man never yet loved, Sara; I looked forward to years of happiness with you; I expected you to be my wife. And—and—I cannot go on!" he broke off. "I cannot speak of this to you."

The tears were rolling down her pale face. "You must not leave me in suspense, Oswald. It may be better for us both that you should speak out freely."

Yes, it might be better for them both; at any rate, he felt that no choice was left to him now. He drew nearer to her and lowered his voice to a whisper.

"Is there no—Heaven pardon me for speaking the word to you, Sara!—disgraceful secret attaching now to—to your family? One which would render it impossible for a man of honour to——"

He would not say more; he had said enough; and

he felt the words to his heart's core. Whatever pain they may have brought to her, they inflicted tenfold more upon him. With a low cry, she flung her hands before her face.

"Is it so, Sara?"

"It is. How did you hear of it?"

"The whisper came to me. Some people might—might—call it murder."

"No, no!" she broke forth in her pain. "It surely was not so bad as that. They kept the details from me, Oswald; but it could not have been so bad as that."

The words fell on his heart like an ice-bolt. Unconsciously to himself he had been hoping that she might disprove the tale. For that purpose he had whispered to her of the worst: but it seemed that she could not deny it. It was quite enough, and he quitted the subject abruptly.

"God bless you, my darling, for ever and for ever," he said, taking her hands in his. "I do not respect or love you less; but I cannot—I cannot—you know what I would say. It is a cruel fate upon me, as upon you; and for the present, for both our sakes, it may be better that our paths in life should lie apart. After awhile we may meet again, as friends, and continue to be such throughout life."

The tears had dried on her face, as it was lifted in the moonlight, its expression one living agony. But there was no resentment in it; on the contrary, she fully justified him. Her hands lingered in his with a farewell pressure, and she strove to re-echo the blessing he had given.

They parted, each going a different way. Oswald Cray, in no mood for the Abbey now, struck off towards the Apple Tree; Sara, drawing her veil over her face, went on to her home.

And so the dream was over. The dream which she had long been unconsciously cherishing, of what a meeting between them might bring about, was over; and Sara Davenal had been rudely awakened to stern reality.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A SPECIAL FAVOUR FOR NEAL.

THE whole night subsequent to the meeting in the Abbey grave-yard with Oswald Cray, did Sara lie awake, striving to battle with her pain. It was very sore to bear. She knew now the cause of his absenting himself; and she knew that they were lost to each other for ever. It is the worst pain that a woman can be called upon to endure: no subsequent tribulation in life can equal its keen anguish.

Ten times in the night she prayed for help—for strength to support, and live, through her mind's trouble. She did not pray that it might be taken from her; that was hopeless; she knew that weeks and months must elapse before even the first brunt would lose its force; that years must roll on before tranquillity could come.

She did not blame Oswald Cray. She believed

that that unhappy secret, of the precise nature of which she was yet in ignorance, had become known to him : how, she could not conjecture. Perhaps he knew it in all its terrible details—and that these were terrible, she doubted less now than ever. Were they not—ay, she fully believed it !—shortening her father's life ? What had been that awful word spoken by Oswald Cray ?—though she could not believe it to be so bad as that. But she knew that it was something to bring disgrace and danger in its train ; and she fully justified Oswald Cray in the step he had taken. Still she thought that he should have come to her in the first onset and plainly said, such and such a thing has come to my knowledge, and therefore we must part. He had not done this ; he had left her for weeks to the slow torture of suspense—and yet that very suspense was more tolerable than the certainty now arrived at. Oh, the dull dead pain that lay on her heart !—never for a long long while to be lifted from it.

She strove to reason calmly with herself ; she essayed to mark out what her future course should be. She knew that there was nothing at present but to bear her burden and hide it from the world's eye ; but she would do her duty all the same, Heaven helping her, in all the relations of life ; she

would strive nobly to take her full part in life's battle, whatever the inward struggle.

There is no doubt that in that night of tribulation she looked at the future in its very darkest aspect. It was well, perhaps, that it should be so, for the horizon might clear a little as she went on. That Mr Oswald Cray would in time marry, she had no right to doubt—a word or two of his had almost seemed to hint at it: man forgets more easily than woman.

Towards morning she dropped into a heavy sleep, and had slept longer than usual. This caused her to be late in dressing, and brought upon her the reproof of punctual Miss Bettina. She looked at herself in the glass ere she went down; at her pale face, her heavy eyelids; hoping, trusting they would escape observation. What a happy thing it is, that others cannot read our faces as we read them!

Miss Bettina was at the head of the breakfast-table. She was suffering from a cold; but, ill or well, she was sure to be at her post; and Dr Davenal stood at the fire, his elbow on the mantel-piece, his forehead leaning on his hand.

Sara went up to him, and he seemed to rouse himself from a reverie as he kissed her. She noticed how ill he looked.

"Papa, I am sure you are worse?"

"I don't feel very well, child."

"If you would but stay at home for a day or two and nurse yourself!"

"Ah! I have not time. There's a great deal of sickness about, and my patients must not be neglected."

"Mark Cray can attend to them."

"To the light cases he could. Not the serious ones; I wouldn't trust them to him."

"Not trust them to him?" echoed Sara.

The surprised tone of the question aroused Dr Davenal; he had spoken out too heedlessly his real thoughts. "People dangerously ill have naturally more confidence in me than in a young man," he said, by way of doing away with the impression his avowal might make.

They took their places at the breakfast-table, neither of them able to eat; the doctor from sickness of body, for he was really ill; Sara from sickness of mind.

"Aunt Bettina, I tell papa he ought not to go out to-day."

"Not going out to-day?" repeated Miss Bettina.

"Why not? What's he going to do, then?"

"I say he ought not to go out. He is not well enough."

Miss Bettina heard this time. She raised her eyes and gazed at the doctor. It was impossible not to see that he did look ill.

"What's the matter with you, Richard?"

"It is only my cold," said the doctor. "It has settled here," touching his chest.

"That's just where mine is settling," grimly returned Aunt Bettina.

"Papa's eating nothing," said Sara.

"As if I could eat, with the skin off my throat and chest!" retorted Miss Bettina, mistaking the words, as usual. "It seems that nobody's eating this morning; you are not; we might as well not have had the breakfast laid. Toast was made to be eaten, Miss Sara Davenal, not to be wastefully crumbled into bits on the plate. I suppose *you* have not got a cold?"

Sara began to pick up the crumbs and the pieces, and to swallow them as she best could. Anything to escape particular observation.

"I wonder how Mrs Cray is this morning?" she presently observed, having ransacked her brains for a subject to speak upon. Miss Bettina heard all awry.

"Oswald Cray! Why should you wonder how he is? Is he ill?"

"I said Mrs Cray, aunt;" and she would have

given much to hide the sharp bright blush that the other name brought to her face. "I told you last evening Caroline was not well. I think you always mistake what I say."

"No, I don't mistake. But you have got into a habit of speaking most indistinctly. My belief is you did say Oswald Cray. He is in town," fiercely added Miss Bettina, as if the fact strengthened her proposition.

"Yes, he is in town," assented Sara, for her aunt was staring so very fixedly at her that she felt herself obliged to say something. "At least he was in town yesterday."

"Where did you see him, Sara?" asked the doctor.

"I met him as I was leaving the Abbey last evening, papa," she replied, not daring to look up as she said it.

"I met him yesterday also," observed Dr Davenal. "He was passing the gate here just as I was about to step into the carriage. He is a puzzle to me."

Miss Bettina bent her ear. "What's a puzzle to you, doctor?"

"Oswald Cray is. I had the very highest opinion of that man. I could have answered for his being the soul of honour, one entirely above the petty

prejudices of the world in ordinary. But he has lost caste in my eyes : has gone down nearly cent per cent."

"It's his pride that's in fault," cried Miss Bettina. "He's the proudest man living, old Sir Philip of Thorndyke excepted."

"What has his pride to do with it?" returned the doctor. "I should say, rather, his selfishness. He has chosen to take umbrage at Lady Oswald's having left her money to me ; and very foolish it was of her, poor thing, to do it ! But why he should visit his displeasure——"

"He has not taken umbrage at that, papa," interrupted Sara.

"Yes, he has," said Dr Davenal. "I spoke to him yesterday of the will, and he declined in the most abrupt manner to hear anything of the matter. His tone in its haughty coldness was half insulting. Why he should have taken it up so cavalierly, I cannot conceive."

Sara remained silent. She did not again dare to dissent, lest Dr Davenal should question her more closely. Better let it rest at that : far better let it be thought that Mr Oswald Cray had taken umbrage at the disposal of the property, than that the real truth should be known.

"I suppose Oswald Cray felt hurt at not being left executor to the will," sagely remarked Miss Bettina. "As to the money, I never will believe that he, with his independent spirit, wanted that."

"He wants his independent spirit shaken out of him, if it is to show itself in this offensive manner," was the doctor's severe remark. "What did he say to you, Sara?"

"Say——?" she stammered, the remembrance of what had really been said between them occurring startlingly to her.

Dr Davenal noted the hesitating words, he noted the crimsoned cheeks; and a doubt which had once before risen up within him, rose again now. But he let it pass in silence.

"Does he intend to come here again, Sara?" asked Miss Bettina.

"I don't know, aunt," was poor Sara's answer. "I suppose he will come again some time."

And in good truth she did suppose he would come again "some time," when the pain of their separation should have worn away.

Sara quitted her seat as she spoke, throwing down a fork with the movement, and hastened to the window.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Miss Bettina.

"It is the postman, aunt."

"The postman!" echoed Miss Bettina sharply, wondering what possessed her niece that morning. "If it is the postman, you need not fly from the breakfast table in that way, upsetting the things. Do you call that manners?"

"Oh, papa," cried Sara, turning round, unmindful of the reproof in her flush of excitement, "I do think here are letters from Edward! Some foreign mail must be in, for the man has an unusual number of letters in his hand, and some of them look like foreign ones."

She turned from the window, and stood gazing at the room door. But no letters appeared. The postman went out again with his quick step, and Sara, feeling grievously disappointed, returned slowly to her seat.

"Is he gone?" presently asked the doctor.

"Oh yes, papa. He is half-way down the street by this time. He came, I suppose, for one of the servants."

"He didn't ring."

"No. He seemed to go straight to your consulting-room window. Perhaps Neal is there, putting the room to rights."

But Dr Davenal did not rest so easily satisfied.

He opened the door and called down the passage in an imperative voice,

"Neal! Are there no letters?"

Neal came gliding into the room from his pantry two letters in his hand.

"Why did you not bring them in at once?" somewhat sternly asked the doctor as he took them, certain past suspicions regarding Neal and such missives arising forcibly to his mind.

"I was looking for my waiter, sir: I have mislaid it somewhere. Oh, I left it here, I see."

The silver waiter was on a side table; not at all where it ought to be; as if it had been put down heedlessly and forgotten. Neal caught it up and retired. It might have been as he said—that the delay was caused by looking for it, and by that only; and Dr Davenal, more inclined to be charitable than suspicious, thought no more of the matter.

In the keen disappointment which had come over him, he nearly lost sight of other things. Neither of the two letters was from his son; and he had so fully expected to hear from him by the present mail!

Sara's heart was beating. "Are they not from Edward, papa?"

The doctor shook his head as he laid the letters down. "They are both from Dick, I expect. His holiday letters."

The two letters were respectively addressed to Miss Davenal, and Miss Sara Davenal. The address to Miss Davenal bore evident marks of care in the writing; it was a clear, regular hand, though easily recognisable as a schoolboy's. The address to Sara was a scrawl scarcely legible. Upon opening the letter, hers, Sara found it beautifully written. Until she came to its close she had no suspicion but that it was really written to herself; she supposed it to be a sort of general holiday letter.

"MY DEAR AND RESPECTED AUNT, AND RELATIVES.

"As the joyful epoch of Christmas approaches, marking the close of another half year, we feel how valuable is that time which the best of us are only inclined to regard too lightly. Yet I hope it will be found that I have not wholly wasted the share of it bestowed on me, but have used it to the best of my power and abilities. When you witness the progress made in each branch of my various studies, to which I have earnestly and assiduously devoted my days and hours, I trust that you will find cause to deem I have been no thoughtless pupil, but have

done my best to merit your favour and the approbation of my masters. In Greek especially—which Dr Keen saw fit to promote me to at Midsummer—I flatter myself you will be satisfied with my advancement : it is a delightful study.

“Deeply sensible of the inestimable value of the talents entrusted to me, anxious that not one of them should lie fallow through fault of mine, it has been my constant and earnest endeavour to improve them, so that they may be turned to profitable use in the after business of life. By industry, by perseverance, and by unflagging attention I have striven to progress, and I may say that it is with regret I part with my beloved studies, even for a temporary period.

“I am desired to present Dr Keen’s compliments to you and my uncle, and to convey to you the intelligence that our winter recess will commence on the 16th of this month, on which day I and Leopold shall hope to return to Hallingham, and to meet you in good health. Leopold regrets sensibly that he will not be able this year to write you his vacation letter : it is a great disappointment to him. He has had a fester on the thumb of his right hand ; it is getting better, but still painful. He begs to offer his affectionate duty to yourself, my uncle, Sara,

and Mrs Cray. And trusting you will accept the same from me,

“ I am, my dear Aunt,

“ Your most sincere and respectful Nephew

“ RICHARD JOHN DAVENAL

“ Miss Davenal”

A smile stole across Sara's features at the wording of the letter, so unlike Dick, and she turned over the envelope.

“ Yes, ‘ Miss Sara Davenal ! ’ Dick has made a mistake in the address. It is written to you, Aunt Bettina.”

But Miss Bettina's eyes were glued to her own letter, which she held open before her. Her lips had drawn themselves in ominously.

“ Is it the holiday letter, Sara ? ” asked the doctor.

“ Yes, papa : Richard's. But it is not written to me.”

Dr Davenal took up the letter. Its writing, almost as beautiful as copper-plate, was as easily read as a book : Master Richard must have taken the greatest pains with it. Miss Davenal's was not so easily read, for it seemed to have been dashed off with a skewer. She threw it on the table in considerable temper when she came to its end, and laid her hand solemnly upon it,

"Dr Davenal, if you do not return this letter instantly to Dr Keen, I shall. It is a disgrace to have come out of any respectable school."

"Who is it from?" questioned the doctor in surprise.

"Who is it from?—from that wicked nephew of yours—Dick. And *you* to encourage him!" she added, directing her severe glance at Sara. "It is meant, I suppose, for you."

In point of fact, Master Dick Davenal had misdirected his letters, sending his holiday letter to Sara, and one intended exclusively for Sara's eyes, to his aunt. Dr Davenal, in some curiosity, drew towards him the offending letter.

"DEAR OLD GIRL,

"We come home the end of next week hur-ray! old Keen was for keeping us till the week after and shouldn't we have turnd rusty but its all fixed now, the 16th is the joyful day and on the 15th we mean to have a bonfire out of bounds and shouldnt we like to burn up all our books in it you cant think how sick we are of them, Jopper says hed give all his tin for next half if books and studies had never been invented and Ime sure I would, I hate learning and that's the truth and I

havent tried to get on a bit for I know its of no use trying, Greak's horrid, and our greak master is an awful stick and keeps us to it till we feel fit to bufett him its the most hateful bothering languidge you can imagine and I shall never master a line of it and if it werent for cribs I should get a caneing every day, latin was bad enough, but greak caps it. We all got into a row which I'll tell you about when I come home and we had our Wensday and saturday holidays stoped for three weeks, it was all threw the writing master a shokking sneek who comes four days a week and found out something and took and told Keen but we have served him out, we have had some good games this half taking things together and if we could berry our books and never do another lesson Keens house wouldnt be so bad, Leo and some more of us were trying to wrench open farmer Clupps stable to get at his poney when he ran a rusty nale into his thum, old clupp was off to a cattle fair by rail and we knew hed be none the wiser if we exercized the pony up and down the common, and a jolly time of it I can tell you we had only we couldnt find the sadle, well leos thum got bad and he hasnt been abel to write for ever so long and hes uncomon glad of it now for it saves him his holiday letter, I had to write

mine five times over before it did and I nearly flung it in the fire before Keens face, I never was so sick of anything in my life, its going to aunt Bett this time Keen said it went to uncle Richard at midsummer, good buy till next week darling Sara love to Carry and mind you get a jolly lot of mince pies ready for us.

“DICK DAVENAL

p. s. hows old Betts deafness, its so cold we hope all the ponds will be froze to ice tomorrow.”

Dr Davenal burst into a fit of laughter. The contrast between the genuine letter of the boy and the formal one dictated by the master was so rich. Miss Davenal's brow wore its heaviest frown: the letter was bad enough altogether, but the insult to herself, the “old Bett,” could not be forgiven.

“I'll have this letter sent back, Dr Davenal.”

“Tush, Bettina! Send it back, indeed! We were schoolboys and schoolgirls ourselves once. Why, what's this?—here's the postman coming in again! He must have omitted to leave all the letters.”

It was even so. The postman by inadvertence had carried away a letter addressed to the house, and had now come back with it.

But that mistake was a great piece of good luck for Neal ; and in truth its occurring on this morning was a singular coincidence. You will agree with me in saying that it was quite a different sort of luck from any deserved by Neal. Poor Dick Davenal's "sneek" of a writing-master could not stand for honours beside the real sneak, Neal.

Neal had not been at Dr Davenal's window when the postman came in the first time, as Sara had surmised ; Neal was standing in his favourite corner outside, amid the shrubs, having a mind to give himself an airing. It was to this corner the postman had gone, and he delivered three letters into his hands. Neal carried them to his pantry and proceeded to examine the outside with his usual curiosity. Two of them were those he subsequently carried into the breakfast room ; on the third he saw the foreign postmark, and recognised the handwriting of Captain Davenal. And, as Neal turned this about in his hand, he became aware of a curious fact—that it was open. The envelope was not fastened down. The captain's seal was upon it in wax, but it did not serve to fasten it. Whether that young officer, who was given to carelessness, had sealed it in this insecure manner, or whether it had come open in the transit, was of no consequence : it was certainly not closed now.

The temptation proved too strong for Mr Neal. It happened that he had a motive, a particular motive, apart from his ordinary curiosity, for wishing to see the contents of this letter. He had chanced to overhear a few words spoken between the doctor and his daughter some days previously—words which Neal could, as he expressed himself, make neither top nor tail of; but they referred to Captain Davenal, and created the strongest possible wish in Neal's mind to take a peep at the first letter that should arrive from the gallant officer. Neal had not seen his way to do this at all clear; but it appeared now that fortune had graciously dropped the means into his hands. And the temptation was too strong to be resisted.

Hastily reasoning within himself (the best of us are too prone to reason on our own side of the question, ignoring the other) that in all probability the breakfast-room had not seen or heard the postman, as the man had kept on *his* side the garden, and had not rung the door-bell, Neal risked it, and carefully drew the letter from the envelope.

A small thin note, addressed to Miss Sara Davenal, dropped out of it. Neal was too busy to pick it up: his eyes were feasting on the opening words of Captain Davenal's letter to his father.

“Neal, are there no letters?”

The interrupting voice was the doctor's : and Neal, in an awful fluster, popped the open letter and the thin one under a dish-cover. There was no help for it : he might not delay ; he dared not take the letter in, open. So he carried in the other two in his hand, having looked in vain for his customary waiter.

It passed off well enough. Neal returned to the pantry, and finished the perusal of the captain's letter. Then he refolded it, placed the note, which he had *not* opened, inside as before, and amended the fastening with a modicum of sealing-wax, dropped artistically underneath the old seal.

He was at his wits' end how to convey the letter to the doctor, so that no suspicion might rest upon himself. Suppress it he dare not, for the postman could have testified to its delivery when inquiries were made. He was coming to the conclusion that the best way would be to put it amidst the shrubs, as if he or the postman had dropped it, and let somebody find it and convey it to Dr Davenal, when the postman's knock at the hall door aroused him.

“I don't know how I came to overlook this,” said the man handing in a letter. “It had got slipped among the others somehow, and I didn't find it till I was ever so far down the street.”

If ever Neal believed in the descent of special favours from the clouds, he believed in it then. The letter brought back by the postman, was directed to Watton. Neal carried it to his pantry, deposited the other upon his silver waiter, and took it to the breakfast-room.

"How's this?" cried the doctor.

"The letter-man carried it away with him, sir, by some mistake, he says," answered Neal with a steady tongue and unflinching eye.

"Stupid fellow!" cried the doctor. But he spoke in a good-natured tone. None, save he, knew how welcome a sight was the handwriting of his son.

And when Neal carried down the breakfast-things he coolly told Watton there was a letter for her lying in his pantry, which had come by the morning post.

"You might have brought it down," was Watton's answer.

"So I might," civilly remarked Neal. "I laid it there and forgot it."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DOCTOR'S BIRTHDAY.

THE dead of the winter passed. That is, Christmas was turned, and January had come in, and was drawing to a close.

Dr Davenal's state of health was beginning to attract attention. It cannot be said that absolute fears were excited, but people said to each other and to him that he ought to take more care. Especial care of himself he certainly did not take, and he seemed to take cold upon cold. It must not be thought that Dr Davenal was recklessly neglectful, supinely careless. It was not that at all. But he was one of the many who seem to have an assured trust in their own constitution; almost believing their state of good health immutable. Other folks are liable to ailments, but *they* have no fear of themselves. This is sometimes notably the case with those

who have never experienced illness, who have passed an active life with neither an ache nor a pain.

As had Dr Davenal. Of a naturally good constitution, temperate in his habits, taking a good deal of exercise one way or another, his mind always occupied, he did not know what it was to have a day's illness. The great blow which had fallen upon him in the death of his son told upon his mind more than upon his body. If it had bent his shoulders and left lines of care upon his face, it had not made him ill. It was reserved for the later calamity to do that—that terrible secret whose particulars none save the doctor knew. *That* had nearly prostrated him—it had re-acted on the body; and when the cold fastened on him the day he had to hasten from Mrs Scott's hot room to the Infirmary, it laid hold of him for ever.

He could not shake it off. Miss Davenal told him somewhat crossly that he kept catching cold upon cold; but the doctor himself knew that it was that first cold hanging about him. He apprehended no real danger: he did not pay much attention to it. Had he possessed a mind at rest, he might have thought more of the body's ailments, but with that great burden of despair—and, in truth, it was little else—weighing him down, what in comparison

was any sickness of body? As to lying by, he never so much as gave it a thought. So long as he could go about, he would go about. He thought of others before himself; he was one who strove hard to do his duty in the sight of God; and he would have deemed it little else than a sin selfishly to stop indoors to nurse himself, when there might be fellow-creatures dying for the want of his aid. It was very easy to say other doctors might attend for him: we all know how valuable in illness is the presence of the physician we *trust*; and none in Hallingham was trusted as was Dr Davenal.

And so, with his aching mind and his aching body, he went about his work. It is just possible that a fortnight or so's rest might have saved him, but he did not take it. He went about his work as usual—nay, with more than his wonted activity, for it was a season of much sickness at Hallingham, as it was that winter in many other places. He bore on, never flagging; but he grew weaker day by day, and everybody remarked how poorly the doctor was looking. No fears for his state were aroused indoors. Sara attributed all she saw amiss in him to the burden of that great secret, of which she had only partial cognizance; and Miss Davenal felt cross with him.

For Bettina Davenal suspected neither illness of

body nor illness of mind. How should she connect the latter with the prosperous physician? She knew that he had been grieved at the going abroad of his son Edward, a grief in which she by no means joined, deeming that a little roughing it out in the world would be found of wholesome benefit to the indulged son and brave captain; and she rather despised the doctor for regretting him. He was silent, and thin and worn; he had no appetite; his spirits seemed gone; she saw all this, but never supposed it was caused by anything but the departure of his son.

His not eating was made the worst grievance of by Miss Bettina. Once before in an unusual season of sickness, the doctor had—not, perhaps, lost his appetite, but allowed himself no time for his meals. Miss Bettina believed that this was a similar case; that his patients were absorbing his appetite and his energies; and she gave him a good sound lecturing, as she might have given to Dick. Get what she would for the table, plain food or dainties, it seemed all one to the doctor: he would taste, perhaps, to please her, but he could not eat.

“I can’t help it,” he said to her one day. “I suppose I am worse than you think.”

For the truth, or rather a suspicion of it, had at

length dawned on Dr Davenal—that he was more seriously ill than he had allowed himself to imagine. Unfavourable symptoms connected with his chest and lungs had forced themselves upon his notice on that very morning, and he asked himself what they meant, and what they boded. Had he neglected himself too long ?

It was the 24th of January, a notable day in the doctor's household, for it was his birthday, and was always kept amongst themselves. Dick and Leo made the day a plea for the extension of their holidays. The school generally re-opened about a week earlier, but of course, as they told their uncle, they could not go back with his birthday so near : they must stay to wish him many happy returns of it. Miss Davenal saw no reason in the plea, and was severe when the doctor allowed it—as he always did ; *she* would never keep boys at home a single hour after the school opened. But with Uncle Richard to back them, Dick and Leo did not care for Aunt Bettina.

Yes, it was on this morning that Dr Davenal awoke to the serious state of his own health. If what he suspected was true, he feared he should not be long in this world.

He said nothing. He went out as usual in his

close carriage, which he had latterly used, and forgot not a single call. But he said to himself that perhaps in a few days, when he should have brought through, if Heaven willed, one or two patients who were lying in extreme danger, he might make arrangements for stopping at home and nursing himself.

On this same day the doctor again saw Oswald Cray. He had occasion to give some directions to Mark, missed seeing him at the Infirmary, and told Roger to drive to the Abbey. Upon entering, he found not Mark, but Oswald. Oswald, it appeared, had just called, and was waiting for Mrs Cray to come down. Mark was out.

Dr Davenal cherished no resentment. He deemed that Oswald Cray had behaved to him badly, but he had never been of a retaliating spirit, and least of all was he inclined to it now.

The doctor pressed Oswald Cray's hand cordially as he shook it. The thought flashed over him that he would make one more effort towards a reconciliation. A few moments, given to commonplace salutations, and then he spoke.

"This is my birthday, Mr Oswald Cray. Mark and Caroline are coming to dine with us : will you join them ?"

"You are very kind. But I must go up to London by the seven train."

Not a word of "wishing" he could come, or regret that he could not. The doctor noticed that; he noticed also that his tone was more polite than warm. But he did not yet give him up.

"It may be the last birthday I shall see. We shall be glad to welcome you."

"I hope you will see many yet; but I am obliged to return to town. Thank you all the same."

Coldly courteous still! Dr Davenal, who would not wait, as Mark was out, again offered his hand in parting.

"Some estrangement has come between us which I do not understand, Mr Oswald Cray. Remember what I say, should this be the last time we speak together, that it is you who have to answer for it, not I."

"One word, Dr Davenal," for the doctor was turning away to regain his carriage. "Believe at least this much, that none can regret the estrangement more than I regret it."

"Is it explainable?"

"Not by me," replied Oswald, somewhat of his old hauteur coming upon him. He honestly believed in his heart that Dr Davenal, in saying these few words, was but acting a part.

"Fare you well," said the doctor as he went out.

"Farewell," repeated Oswald. And they were the last words ever spoken between them.

It was a social family dinner that evening at Dr Davenal's, and for some of its partakers a right merry one. Mark Cray and his wife were merry as heart could wish, the two boys boisterously so, Miss Davenal gracious. Sara was quiet, the doctor was ill, and a gentleman, whom the doctor had invited after Oswald Cray declined, was grieving over the alteration so conspicuously visible in Dr Davenal.

This was the Rev. John Stephenson. He was at Hallingham on business, had called that afternoon on Dr Davenal, and the doctor had pressed him to stay dinner.

When the cloth was removed, and Mr Stephenson had said grace, and Dick and Leo were up to their eyes in nuts and oranges, Mark Cray stood in his place and made a natty little speech. Mark was fond of making speeches: they were a great deal more to his taste than surgical operations. His present effort lasted five minutes, and wound up with wishing the doctor many happy returns of the day.

"Hurrah!" shouted Dick. "Uncle Richard, I hope you'll have a hundred birthdays yet!"

"And plenty of good things for you to eat as they come round, eh, Dick?" rejoined the doctor with a smile.

"Oh, of course," cried Dick, his eyes sparkling. "It always does come in the Christmas holidays you know."

The doctor slightly rose from his chair, leaning with both hands on the table. His manner was subdued, his voice inexpressibly gentle and loving.

"My dear friends, I thank you for your kindness; I thank you from my very heart. I am not well, and you must accept these few words in answer to Mark's more elaborate speech. It may be the last time I shall be here to receive your good wishes or to thank you for them. May God bless you!"—and he raised his hands slowly and solemnly—"May God bless and love you all when I shall be gone!"

The words took them utterly by surprise. Sara bent her head, and pressed her hands upon her bosom as if to press down the sudden sobs that seemed as if they would choke her; Dick and Leo stared; Miss Bettina complacently nodded her acknowledgments, she knew not why, for she had failed to hear; and Caroline looked up in wonder. Mark Cray was the first to speak.

"Do you feel ill, sir?"

"Not particularly ; not much more so than I have felt lately. I don't think I am very well, Mark."

"You are overworked, sir. You must take some rest."

"Rest may be nearer for me than we think, Mark."

"Oh, papa, don't !" wailed Sara. "Don't speak so, unless you would break my heart !"

Her emotion had become uncontrollable, and the anguish had spoken out. Never until that moment had the prospect of losing her father been brought palpably before Sara, and it was more than she well knew how to bear. In spite of her natural reticence of feeling, of the presence of a stranger, she quite shook with her hysterical sobs.

Miss Davenal was frightened, and somewhat indignant : she bent her head forward. "What on earth's the matter with Sara ?"

"Hush, Aunt Bettina," called out Mrs Cray. "Don't scold her. Uncle Richard has been talking gloomily. He says he is ill."

"Ill ! of course he is ill," retorted Miss Bettina, who had contrived to hear. "He won't eat. He is out and about with his patients from morning till night, and then comes in too tired to eat anything. He has not swallowed a couple of ounces of meat

all the last week. What can he expect but to be ill? But there's no cause for Sara to burst into a violent fit of crying over it. Will you be so kind as to excuse it, sir?" she added, in her stately courtesy, to the clergyman who was sitting at her right hand.

He bowed. A man who has known long-continued adversity can feel for sorrow, and his heart was aching for the grief of the child, and for the serious change he saw in the father, his benefactor. Mark turned to Miss Davenal.

"It is just what I say, Miss Bettina, that the doctor is overworked. He wants a week or two's rest."

"And what are you good for if you can't contrive that he should have it?" was her answer. "I think you might see his patients for him."

"So I could," answered Mark. "Only he won't let me."

Sara's emotion was subsiding: she sat very still now, her head a little bent, as if ashamed of having betrayed it; the tears dried upon her cheeks, but an uncontrollable sob broke from her now and then. Dr Davenal had taken her hand under the table, for she sat next to him, and was holding it in his.

"You foolish child!" he fondly whispered.

"Papa, if—if anything were to happen to you—if you were to go and leave me here alone, I should die," was the answer, uttered passionately.

"Hush, hush! My darling, you and I are alike in the hands of a loving God."

She laid her fingers again upon her bosom. How violently it was beating, how difficult it was to still its throbs of pain, she alone knew.

"I met that gentleman this afternoon, the connection of Lady Oswald's whom I saw for the first time the day of the funeral," spoke up the clergyman, breaking the silence which had fallen upon the room. "Mr Oswald Cray."

"I met him, too," said the doctor. "It was at your house, Mark. I asked him to come here to-day, but he declined."

"He is gone back to town, I think," said Mark.

"He said he was going."

"Did you ask him to dine here, Uncle Richard?" cried Leo.

"I did, my boy."

"And wouldn't he?" rejoined Mark.

"No, he wouldn't. And, mind, I think he *wouldn't*; although he declined upon the plea of having to get back to town."

"My! what a stupid duff he was!" exclaimed

Richard. "Did he know there was going to be a turkey and plum-pudding?"

"I didn't tell him that, Dick. My impression is, that he never means to enter our house again," the doctor added in a low tone to his daughter.

"But why?" exclaimed Caroline, who sat on the other side the doctor, and caught the words. "There must be something extraordinary at the bottom of all this."

"Never mind going into it now, Carine," whispered the doctor. "His grievance is connected with Lady Oswald's will, but we need not say so before Mr Stephenson."

Sara looked up hastily, impulsive words rising to her lips; but she recollected herself, and bent her head again in silence. Not even to her father dared she to say that his conclusion was a mistaken one.

"Uncle Richard, now that I look at you, it does appear to me that you are changed for the worse," remarked Mrs Cray. "You must nurse yourself, as Mark says. Hallingham would not understand your being ill, you know."

"True," laughed the doctor.

Caroline Cray, seeing her uncle daily, or nearly so, had not perceived the great change which had been gradually going on in him. But to Mr

Stephenson, who had not met him since the time of Lady Oswald's death, it was all too palpable. As it had been that day to Oswald Cray.

"We must not forget the captain to-day, doctor," spoke up Mark. "Have you heard from him again?"

"Oh yes."

"How does he like his Maltese quarters?"

"I am not sure that he has said. It is not of much consequence whether he liked them or not. The regiment was ordered on to India."

"To India!"

"Yes."

It was impossible not to note the sad tone in which the monosyllable was spoken. Dr Davenal had begun to know that he and his son should never again meet on earth : the son whom he so loved !

Somehow, what with one thing and another, that birthday evening was a sadder one than they had been accustomed to spend. Mark Cray, as he walked home with his wife afterwards, remarked that it was "slow." But nobody dreamt of anything like fear for the doctor, save his daughter and the Reverend Mr Stephenson.

"I can never be sufficiently grateful to you, sir," murmured the clergyman, as he was leaving. "Neither can my brother. You have done for us

what I believe no other man living would have done. May Heaven reward you, and restore you to health and strength !”

“I did but my duty,” answered the doctor. “The money belonged to you, not to me. I am only glad there were no vexatious legal obstacles brought up to obstruct the transfer. I shall always be glad to see you, remember, when you come to Hallingham.”

Mr Stephenson thanked him. But as he went out, the impression was strong upon his mind that the doctor himself would not long be in Hallingham.

And Sara ? What must it have been for her ? Her mind was one chaos of tumultuous emotion. She seemed to have accepted the fear as a certainty, to have been obliged to accept it. Oh, what would save him ?—could not the whole faculty restore *his* precious life ? She passed another night of anguish, like unto the one she had passed nearly two months before, after parting with Oswald Cray in the Abbey grave-yard—like it, but more apprehensively painful ; and she wondered how she got through it.

With the morning, things did not wear so intensely gloomy an aspect. The broad daylight, the avocations and bustle of daily life, are an antidote to gloom, and the worst prospect loses some of its darkness then. Sara tried to reason with herself that he

could not have become so ill on a sudden as to be past recovery, she tried to say that it was foolish even to think it.

But her mind could not be at rest, her state of suspense was intolerable, and before entering the breakfast-room she knocked at her father's study-door, and entered. Dr Davenal was closing the Bible.

"What is it, my dear?"

"Oh papa"—and the words came forth with a burst of pent-up anguish—"I cannot live in this suspense. What did you mean last night? What is it that is the matter with you?"

"I scarcely know, Sara. Only that I feel ill."

"But—you—cannot—be going to die!"

"Hush, my child! You must not agitate yourself in this way. Die? Well, no, I hope not," he added, quite in a joking manner. "I feel ten per cent. better this morning than I did yesterday."

"Do you?" she eagerly cried. "But—what you said last night?—"

"Last night I felt gloomy—oppressed. Serious thoughts do intrude themselves sometimes on one's birthday. And I was really ill yesterday. I feel quite a different man to-day."

Her fears were growing wonderfully calmer. "You are sure, papa?"

"Sure of what? That I am better?—I am sure I feel so. I shall be all right, child, I hope."

"Won't you have advice, papa?" she imploringly said.

"Advice? That's a compliment to myself, young lady. Hallingham would tell you that there's no advice better than Dr Davenal's own."

"But, papa—I mean different advice. I thought of the clever London doctors. You must have them down to see you."

"Some of the clever London doctors would be glad of the countryman Richard Davenal's advice. Seriously speaking, my dear, though I say it in all modesty, I don't believe there's a man in Europe more skilful than myself."

"But they might suggest remedies that you would not think of. O papa! if there's a necessity, do summon them."

"Be assured of one thing, Sara, and set your mind at rest. Should the necessity arise, I will not fail to seek any one or anything that I think may help me. My life has not of late been a happy one, but I am not quite tired of it; I wish I may live long, not only for your sake, but for—for other interests. There's a double necessity for it now."

"And you will not go out to-day, papa?"

"To-day I must. I have not made arrangements to the contrary. But I do mean to give myself a rest, perhaps beginning with to-morrow. I feel a great deal better to-day—quite another man."

How the words lightened her heart! Dr Davenal really did feel much better, and the saddened spirit, the almost ominous feeling, which had clung to him the night before, had vanished. But he spoke more lightly of his illness than he would have done had he not seen how it was affecting her.

Dick came drumming at the door, and then pushed it open with a bang.

"Breakfast's waiting, Uncle Richard. And Aunt Bett—Why! are you there?" broke off the young gentleman as his eyes fell upon Sara. "I'm afraid you'll catch it. Aunt Bett thinks you are not down, and it's ten minutes past eight."

"Are you ready for school, Dick?" asked his uncle. "Elated at the prospect of returning?"

Dick pulled a long face. The two boys were going back that day. A sore trial to Dick, who, it must be confessed, had been born with an innate antipathy to books.

"You'll have us home at Easter, Uncle Richard?" he pleaded in a piteous tone.

"Not if I know it, Dick. Holidays twice a year

were thought quite enough in my school-days, and I see no reason for their not being thought enough now."

"Half the boys go home at Easter—and stop a fortnight," bemoaned Dick.

"Very likely. If half the boys have friends who prefer play to work for them, I'm only glad the other half set a better example. Dicky, boy, you'll enjoy your Midsummer holidays all the more keenly for having none at Easter."

The doctor caught hold of the boy and wound his arm affectionately round him as they proceeded across the hall to the breakfast-room. Miss Davenal greeted Sara with one of her severest aspects, but before she could begin her lecture, Mark Cray had burst in upon them.

"Have you heard the news?" he exclaimed, in a state of excitement never yet witnessed in easy Mark Cray. "Doctor, have you had letters yet?"

"What news? What letters?" asked the doctor.

"Caroline has got her money."

"Caroline got her money?" repeated Dr Davenal, understanding no better than the rest did.

"The Chancery case is decided," explained Mark. "Judgment was given yesterday, and it is in their favour. She'll get the money directly now."

"How do you know this, Mark?"

"It is in the evening papers—reported in full. I call for my letters sometimes if I am passing the post-office, and I did so this morning and got this paper. White, the lawyer, sent it, I expect, and we shall no doubt hear by this evening's post."

"Well, Mark, I am very glad. Justice lay on Caroline's side, therefore it is right that she should have it. You must settle it upon her as soon as you touch the money."

"Oh, of course," said Mark.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BAD NEWS FOR HALLINGHAM.

"I SAY, Neal, what sort of a place is St Paul's Churchyard?"

The questioner was Watton. She sat in the servants' room near the window, against which the rain was pattering, some household sewing in her hand. Neal, who had entered to get a glass he wanted, was rather taken with surprise, but he was not one to show it in his manner.

"Did you never see it?" he asked.

"I saw it in a picture once. I couldn't see it elseways; I've never been to London."

"It is a large space of land with houses round it and the cathedral in the middle," explained Neal, who seemed always ready to oblige his fellow-servants, especially Watton. "It's a thoroughfare, you know; the road from Ludgate Hill to Cheapside

winds round on each side the cathedral, between it and the houses."

"Is it very noisy?"

"Pretty well for that. But the London people don't seem to care for noise. I expect they are so used to it that they don't hear it."

"The houses round St Paul's are warehouses, arn't they?"

"Warehouses and shops. The shops are mostly on one side, and the warehouses on the other."

"Do you know a place called Cannon Street?"

"I should think I do! It leads down from St Paul's to King William Street. Why do you ask?"

"Well," said Watton slowly, as if she were deliberating something in her mind, "I am not sure but I am going to live there."

"To live in St Paul's Churchyard?" repeated Neal.

"I have had a place offered me there, and it seems to me to be a very eligible one," said Watton. "It's to go as housekeeper in a house of business; some large wholesale place, by what I can understand. I should have two or three servants under me, and twenty-five pounds a year. It seems good, doesn't it?"

"Capital," assented Neal. "Is it in St Paul's Churchyard?"

"It's either in St Paul's Churchyard or Cannon Street. She isn't quite sure which, she says. Any way, it's close to St Paul's."

"Who's 'she'?" questioned Neal.

"My sister. Her husband is in this establishment, a traveller, or something of that. He has got on well: he was only day assistant in a shop when she married him, fifteen years ago, and now he gets two or three hundred a year. When Miss Bettina told me I should have to leave, I wrote to my sister and asked her to look out for me, and she has sent me word of this."

"But can she get the place for you?" inquired Neal, who was prompt at weighing probabilities and improbabilities in his mind.

"It is in this way. The present housekeeper has been there a good while, and is much respected by the masters, and they have asked her to look out for somebody to take her place. My sister's intimate with her, and has spoken to her about me."

"Why is she going to leave, herself?" questioned Neal, liking to come to the bottom of everything.

Watton laughed. "She is going to begin life on her own score: she's about to be married. I think it's rather venturesome, those middle-aged persons marrying: I wouldn't, I know."

"Wait until you are asked," returned Neal, not over gallantly.

"I have been asked more than once in my life," said Watton. "But I didn't see my way clear. It's all a venture. A good many risk it, and a few don't. I'd rather be one of the few. My goodness! how it rains!"

"When do you leave here?"

"When I get a comfortable place. Miss Bettina said I was not to hurry. It isn't as if I were leaving for any fault, or to make room for another. *She* doesn't like my leaving at all, you know."

Neal nodded. "I heard her grumbling to the doctor, like anything, about it. She talks loud, and one can't shut one's ears at will."

"She need not grumble to the doctor. It is not his fault. He spoke to me himself, saying how sorry he was to part with me, but he could not help it. 'He had had a severe loss of money,' he said, which rendered it necessary that he should alter the rate of his expenditure. I wonder," added Watton, musingly, "how he came to lose it?"

Neal coughed. "Perhaps some bank broke?"

"Perhaps it did," answered Watton. "They are ticklish things, those banks. I say, Neal, there's the doctor's bell."

Neal heard the bell for himself, and quitted the room to answer it. Watton got up, put down her work, shook a few threads from her gown, opened a drawer and took out a letter.

She was going upstairs to Miss Bettina to show her the letter she had received, and to ask her advice upon the situation mentioned in it. She felt very much inclined to try for it; only she felt a shrinking doubt of London. Many persons do who have lived to middle age in the country.

Neal entered the room in answer to the ring. The doctor had been out that morning, but returned earlier than usual, for it was not much past twelve. It was the day subsequent to the departure for school of Dick and Leo.

"What a poor fire you have got here, Neal!" said the doctor. "Bring a few sticks and pile the coal on. I feel chilly."

"I hope you have not taken a fresh cold, sir," respectfully observed Neal, as he stirred up the fire preparatory to getting the sticks.

Whether Neal was right or not as to the fresh cold, certain it was, that before night unfavourable symptoms began to manifest themselves in Dr Davenal. And they increased rapidly.

A few hours and the news went forth to the town

—Dr Davenal was in danger. The consternation it excited cannot well be described—and if described would scarcely be believed. Numbers upon numbers in that town looked upon Dr Davenal in the light of a public benefactor: they honestly believed that his death would be one of the greatest calamities that could befall them; they believed that, if he went, nobody else could bring *them* through danger, should it come upon them.

They hastened to the door with their anxious inquiries; they saw the medical men of Hallingham pouring in. What was the matter with him? they eagerly asked. How was he seized?

It was inflammation of the chest, or lungs, or both, they were told. It was in fact an increase of the cold which had been so long hanging upon him, and *which he had neglected*. Oh, only a cold! they repeated carelessly as they listened—what a mercy that it was nothing worse. And they went away re-assured.

A day or two, and there came down a physician from London in answer to a telegraphic dispatch. A day or two more and an ominous whisper went forth to the town—that hope was over. The saddened inhabitants paced to and fro, collected in groups about the door, and glanced up at the

doctor's windows, fearing if perchance the blinds should have been drawn since they last looked. They watched the medical men glide in and out; they saw a lawyer go in with a bustling step, and came to the conclusion that he went to make the will. Altogether Hallingham was in a fever of excitement.

But there occurred a change; contrary to even the most sanguine expectation, a change seemed to take place for the better. Dr Davenal rallied. The most painful symptoms left him, and some of those around him said he was getting well.

One evening at dusk, Neal was observed to come out of the house with a quick movement and hasten up the street. As usual he was instantly surrounded, waylaid by anxious inquirers.

Yes, it was perfectly true, Neal answered, his master was so much better as to surprise all who saw him. The change took place early that morning, and he had been mending ever since. He was well enough to sit up: was sitting up then.

Then there was a hope that he'd recover? the questioners rejoined, scarcely daring to speak the joyful words.

Oh yes, there seemed every hope of it now. Mr Cray, who had just gone out, remarked to him,

Neal, that he looked upon his master as cured. But Neal couldn't stop to talk more with them then, he said; he was hastening to the chemist's for a draught which the doctor himself had sent him for.

Neal got the draught, imparted the news of the doctor's wonderful improvement to the crowd collecting at the chemist's, for no end of gossipers pressed into the shop when they saw Neal there, retraced the streets with his soft tread, and arrived at home. Entering the consulting-room, where the fire in the grate was getting low, he passed on to his master's bedchamber. Quite a bright chamber for an invalid's. The fire was blazing in the grate, and a handsome lamp, shining through the ornamental pink shade that covered its globe, stood on the small round table. The bed was at the far end of the room in a corner, and Dr Davenal sat in an easy chair near the fire. He was dressed, all but his coat; in place of that, he wore a warm quilted dressing-gown of soft rich silk: one of those rarely handsome dressing-gowns that seem made to be looked at, not to be worn.

He did not appear very ill. Wan and worn certainly, but not so ill as might have been expected. His breath and voice were the worst: both were painfully weak. The table had been drawn

close to him, and he was writing at it. A tolerably long letter it looked like, covering three sides of large note-paper. Perhaps, if the truth had been declared, he had got up purposely to write this letter.

Sara sat on the other side the fireplace, ready to wait upon him. How she had borne the agony of the last few days and been *calm*, she did not know, she never would know : it was one of the sharp lessons learnt from life's necessities. "You may be with him," the physician in London had said to her, "provided you can maintain composure in his presence. The witnessing of a child's grief is sometimes the worst agony that the dying have to bear. I cannot sanction your being in the room unless you can promise to be calm."

"I will promise it," replied Sara in a low tone ; but that one expression "the dying" had turned her whole heart to sickness.

Yes, it was one of the lessons that must be learnt in the stern school of life—the maintaining a composed exterior when the heart is breaking. That she was given to reticence of feeling by nature, was of service to Sara Davenal then. But surely the trials that had latterly fallen upon her were very bitter ; the battle just now was sharp and keen.

She sat there in her soft dress of violet merino, so quiet and unobtrusive in the sick-room, with its little white lace collar and the narrow lace cuffs turned up on the bands of the sleeves at the wrist. The first day of his illness she had on a silk dress rustling against the chairs and tables, and she had the good sense to go and change it. The chair she sat in was an elbow one, and her hot cheek rested on her fingers as she strove to drive back the inward question that *would* intrude itself, whether this improvement was for good, or only a fallacious one. She sat perfectly still, her eyes following the motion of his feeble fingers, and it was thus that Neal interrupted them.

"The draught, sir," he said, laying it on the table.

"Set a wine-glass by it," said the doctor. "That will do."

So slowly and feebly! The voice seemed to come from deep down in his chest, and not to be the doctor's voice at all. Neal put the wine-glass as desired, and quitted the room; and the doctor wrote on.

Only for a minute or two: the letter was drawing to a close. Dr Davenal pressed it with the blotting-paper, read it to himself slowly, and then folded it and put it in an envelope. In all this, his fingers

seemed scarcely able to perform their office. He fastened it down, and wrote on the outside his son's name. Then he looked at Sara, touching the letter with his finger.

"My dear, when the next mail goes out, should you have occasion to write of me, let this be enclosed."

"To write of you, papa?" she repeated in a faltering tone. But she need not have asked the question—its meaning had only too surely penetrated to her.

"Should the worst have happened."

"Oh, but—papa—you are getting better!"

She checked the wailing tone; she remembered how necessary, as she had been warned, was calmness in that room; she remembered her promise to maintain it. She pressed her hands upon her bosom and remained still.

"I will take that draught now, Sara, if you'll pour it out."

She rose from her seat, undid the paper, poured the contents of the small bottle into the glass, and handed it to him. The doctor drank it, and gave her back the glass with a smile.

"Not one of those clever fellows thought of ordering me this; yet it's the best thing for anybody suffering as I am. Ah! they have got something to

learn yet. I don't know how they'll get on without me."

"Papa, you may get well yet!" she interrupted; and she *could not* prevent the anguished sound with which the words were spoken.

He turned and looked at her; he seemed to have fallen into a momentary reverie. But he made no direct answer.

"Can you draw the table away, Sara? I don't want it so close now. Gently; take care of the lamp."

"Where shall I put this, papa?" she asked, referring to the letter.

"In my desk in the next room. You'll know where to find it in case of need. My keys are here, on the mantel-piece."

She stopped to ask one question which seemed to be wrung from her in her pain. "Is it to go all the same if you get better, papa?"

"No. Not if I get better."

Passing into the other room, which was lighted only by the fire, she drew the desk from underneath the table, knelt down, unlocked it, and put in the letter. It was addressed: "For my son, Edward Davenal." Sara was locking the desk again, when some one entered the room and came round the table to where she knelt.

"My goodness ! are you saying your prayers ?"

Wrapped in silks and ermine, her lovely face peeping out from a charming pink bonnet, was Mrs Cray. The doctor had expressed a wish to Mark Cray that afternoon that Caroline would come to him, and Mark had delivered the message when he got home.

"Mark says Uncle Richard wants to see me," she explained, "so I thought I'd run down at once. I can't stop ; Berry and another friend or two are going to dine with us. I am so delighted to hear of the improvement in Uncle Richard ! Mark says the danger is quite over."

"If I could but be sure it was !" was Sara's answer.

"There you are, with your doubts and fears ! Never was anybody like you, Sara. Don't I tell you Mark says it is ? Yes, I'll take my cloak off for the few minutes that I stop."

She threw off her bonnet, and let the cloak slip from her shoulders, displaying her evening attire, for she had dressed before she came out : a silk, so light as to look almost white, that stood on end with richness and rustled as she walked ; the dazzling necklace, given by Captain Davenal, on her white neck ; a dew-dropped pink rose in her gleaming hair.

Utterly unaccordant looked she with the chamber of the dying, as she stepped into the other room. Dr Davenal's eyes were fixed on her for a moment in simple wonder, as if he saw a vision. Then he recognised her, and held out his hand, a glad look pervading his countenance.

"Well, Uncle Richard! I am so rejoiced that you are getting better. You'll come and dance at our housewarming yet."

"Are you going to hold one?" asked the doctor, as he held her hand in his, and gazed up at her beauty.

"Mark and I are thinking of it. We can do everything, you know, now that that money's coming to me."

"Ah," said the doctor, "it's about that money I want to talk to you. Sit down, Caroline. How smart you are, my dear!"

"Nay, I think it's you who are smart, uncle," she returned with a gay laugh. "So it has come into use at last!"

Caroline touched the dressing-gown as she spoke. There had always been a joke about this dressing-gown. A patient of the doctor's, as fanciful as Lady Oswald and nearly as old, had made it with her own hands and sent it to him. It had remained unused.

For one thing, the doctor was too plain in his habits and too busy a man to require a dressing-gown at all; for another, he had looked upon the garment as extravagantly fine.

"Yes," said he, in answer to Caroline's remark, "I have found it useful to-day. It is very warm and comfortable. Caroline, I have been talking again to Mark about the money."

"Well, uncle?"

"I don't know that it is well. Mark does not appear inclined to make me any promise that it shall be settled upon you when it comes. I urged it upon him very strongly this afternoon, and he answered me in his light careless manner, 'Of course. Oh yes, doctor, I'll remember;' but he did not give a specific promise; whether by accident or design, I cannot say. So I told him to send you down to me."

"Yes, uncle," she said, thinking more of the weakness of the voice to which she was listening, than of the import of the words.

"This money must be settled upon you, Caroline, the instant that you touch it. It is essential that a married woman should, if possible, have some settlement. If I recover, I shall take care that this is so settled, but——"

"If you recover!" she interrupted. "Why, Uncle Richard, you are getting well as fast as you can. Mark says so. You are sitting up!"

"True; I am sitting up; and I could not have sat up two or three days ago. Still, I am not sure about the getting well."

"But Mark says so; he says you are," reiterated Caroline.

"And Mark's opinion, as a medical man, must be infallible, you think," rejoined the doctor, with a momentary look in his face that Caroline did not understand. "At any rate, my dear, it is well to remember all contingencies. 'Hope for the best, and prepare for the worst,' was one of your Grand-papa Davenal's favourite maxims. You must have the money settled upon you——"

"But, Uncle Richard, are you quite sure that it would be for the best?" she interposed. "If the money is settled in that way, it would be all tied up, and do us no good after all."

"You would enjoy the interest."

"That's not over much," said Caroline slightly. "I and Mark have been planning a hundred things that we might do with the money. Re-furnish the Abbey splendidly for one."

"You and Mark are a couple of simpletons,"

retorted the doctor, regaining momentarily his energy of voice. But the effort was too much, and he lay panting for several minutes afterwards. Caroline sat gazing at him, her finger unconsciously raised to her neck, playing with the gleaming toy there. Which should she trust to, these signs of illness, or Mark's opinion ?

"Caroline, I insist that the money be settled upon you. Were you and Mark to waste it in nonsense, it would be nothing less than a fraud upon your West Indian relatives from whom it is derived. You may tell Mark so from me. That money, Carine, secured to you, would at least keep the wolf from coming quite in, should he ever approach your door."

Caroline sat aghast, wondering whether the doctor had lost his senses. "The wolf at the door for us, Uncle Richard ! As if that could ever be !"

"Ah, Carine, I have lived to know that there is no permanent certainty in the brightest lot," he answered with a sigh. "My dear, more experience has been forced upon me in the past year or two, than I had learnt in the whole course of my previous life. Understand me once for all, this money must be secured to you."

"Very well, Uncle Richard," she answered with

ready acquiescence. "It shall be so, as you seem so much to wish it. I'll tell Mark all you say."

A few minutes longer, and Caroline rose. Dr Davenal was surprised that she should be going again so very soon, and looked inquiringly at her. "Can't you stay a little longer, Caroline?"

"I wish I could; but I shall hardly get back to dinner, and we expect some friends to-day. Good night, Uncle Richard."

He drew her face down to his, murmuring his farewell. Little did Caroline Cray think it would be his last.

Sara went out with her cousin, and saw her depart with the servant who had waited for her. When she returned to the chamber, the doctor was in deep thought.

"I think you must bring the table near to me again, Sara," he said. "There's another word or two I should like to write."

"Yes, papa. Do you want Edward's letter?"

"No, no; it's not to him. There. Dip the pen in the ink for me."

It was a tacit confession of weakness that she did not like to hear; and she saw that even in the short space of time that had elapsed since he wrote before, his strength had visibly declined. He was scarcely able to guide the pen.

"That will do," he said, when he had traced a few lines. "Sara, should you have occasion to send this, enclose it in a note from yourself, explaining my state when I penned it; that I was almost past writing. Will you remember?"

"Yes, papa," she answered, her heart beating painfully at the words.

"Fold it for me."

Honourable in all her thoughts and actions, Sara folded the note with the writing turned from her. It is just possible some children might have been sufficiently actuated by curiosity to glance at least at the name at the commencement of the note. Not so Sara Davenal. She placed it in an envelope and fastened it down.

"I think I can direct it, Sara. Just the name."

She gave him the pen, and he traced the name in uneven, doubtful letters. Sara noted it with surprise, and perhaps her pulses quickened. "O. Oswald Cray, Esquire."

"Put it in my desk with Edward's, my dear. If you have occasion to send the one, you will the other."

As she unlocked the desk again, her tears were raining down fast. In all that her father was saying and doing there seemed to be a foreshadowing in his

own mind of his approaching death. She quitted the room for a few minutes, that her emotion might spend itself, and in the interval Miss Davenal entered. The soft rustling of Miss Bettina's sweeping silks aroused the doctor, who had fallen into a doze. She went up and took his hand.

"Richard, how are you to-night?"

"I hardly know. Middling."

"Sara is fancying you are not so well."

"Is she?"

"But she always was given to fancies, you know. Is it right that you should sit up so long the first time of leaving your bed?"

"Yes, I like the change. I was tired of bed. Sit down, Bettina. There are one or two things I want to say to you."

"Are you finding yourself worse?"

"Bettina, I have not been better."

"The doctors have thought you so," she said, after a pause.

"Ay, but I know more of my own state than they can tell me. When the suffering and its signs passed, they leaped to the conclusion that the disease had left me. In a measure, so it has, but they should have remembered in how many of such cases the apparent improvement is all deceit, the forerunner of the end."

Bettina Davenal fully understood the words and what they implied. But she was not a demonstrative woman, and the rubbing together of her white and somewhat bony hands was the sole sign of the inward aching heart.

"And I am thankful for the improvement," added the doctor. "It is not all who are permitted this freedom from pain in their dying hours."

"O Richard! is there *no* hope?"

"I fear not," he gravely answered. "I am accustomed to impress upon my patients the great truth that while there is life there is hope, and I should be worse than a heathen to ignore it in my own case. But, all I can say is, I cannot trust to it."

She had laid one of her hands upon the folds of the dressing-gown, and the doctor could feel the twitching of the fingers. He had asked her to sit down, but she preferred to stand. Close to him, with her head bent, she could hear his low words without much misapprehension, so deliberately were they spoken between the panting breath.

"Bettina, I don't go to my grave as I thought I should have gone, providing for my children. I have been obliged to sacrifice all I had put by. It was not a great deal, it's true, for I am but what's called a middle-aged man, and my expenses have

been high. Could I have foreseen my early death, I should have lived at half the rate. And this sacrifice will not die with me. The house—I daresay I shall shock you, Bettina—is mortgaged; not, however, to its full value. I have directed in my will that it shall be sold; and the residue, after the mortgage is paid—can you hear me?” he broke off to ask.

“Every word.”

“The residue and the proceeds of the furniture, and those two small cottages of mine, and other effects which will be likewise sold, will make a fair sum. There’s money owing to me in the town, too. Altogether I expect there will not be much less than three thousand pounds——”

“Richard!” shrieked out Miss Bettina, in her emotion. “*Three* thousand! I thought you were worth ten at least.”

“No, it was not so much as that altogether. I had four or five thousand put by. Never mind: I say I have had to sacrifice it. I feel how imprudent I have been, now that it is too late.”

“To what have you had to sacrifice it?”

The doctor paused before he replied. “A sudden claim came upon me of which I knew nothing: a claim for thousands. No, Bettina, I know what you

wish to say—believe me, I *could not* resist it : to pay it was obligatory. The worst is, I could not pay it all : and the sum which the property will realise will have to be applied to liquidate it.”

“But you can tell me what the claim was for?”

“No, I cannot. It is not altogether my secret, Bettina, and you must not inquire into it. I need not have mentioned it at all to you, but for speaking of Sara. My poor children must suffer. Edward has his pay, and he will have to make it suffice : Sara has nothing. Bettina, you will give her a home?”

“There’s no necessity for you to ask it,” was Bettina Davenal’s answer. But she spoke crossly ; for the want of confidence in not intrusting to her the nature of this secret, was hurting her feelings bitterly. “Should anything happen to you, Sara will naturally find a home with me—if she can put up with its plainness. I shall make her as welcome, and consider it as obligatory on me to do so, as though she were my own child.”

The doctor lay back for a moment in his chair, panting. His fingers clasped themselves over hers in token of thanks.

“Richard, surely you might place more confidence in me ! If you have been called upon to pay

this money in consequence of—of any bygone trouble or debt contracted in your youth—and I conclude it must be something of that sort—do you suppose I cannot be true and keep your counsel? I know what follies the young plunge into!”

“Follies? Crimes, rather!” And the words broke from Dr Davenal with a groan which told of the deepest mental anguish. It pained even the dull ear that was bent to it.

“Bettina, I say that you must not ask me. If it concerned myself alone you should know as much as I do, but I could not tell you without betraying another; and—and—there might be danger. Let it rest. Better for you that it should do so, for it would disturb your peace as it has disturbed mine.”

“It’s a dreadful sum,” said Miss Bettina.

“It is that. And my poor children must be left beggars. I have enjoined Mark Cray to pay three hundred pounds yearly to Sara for five years, out of the proceeds of the practice. He can well afford to do it: and if you will give her a home, this had better be invested for her, Bettina.”

“Of course. But what’s three hundred for five years? You might make better terms with Mark Cray than that.”

“Mark has promised faithfully to do it. I have

been talking with him this afternoon about that and other things. I asked him what sum he would feel inclined to pay to Sara out of the business, and for what term. He said he thought he could give three hundred a year, and would continue it for five years."

"Considering all things, it is not a very generous offer," persisted Miss Bettina. "Had your life been spared, Mark could not have expected to step into the whole of the practice these twenty years."

"It is very fair, I think, Bettina. Mark must acquire experience, remember, must work his way up to the public confidence, before people trust him as they have trusted me. He will not have his rooms filled daily with patients at a guinea a head. This has come upon me suddenly, or all things might have been managed differently. I think it would be a good plan for Mark to leave the Abbey for this house; I have told him so; but he will be the best judge of that."

Miss Bettina quitted her stooping posture by the doctor and sat down, revolving all that had been said. She sat slowly rubbing her hands the one over the other, as was her habit when anything troubled her.

"I cannot realise it," she said, in a half whisper,

"Richard, I *cannot* realise it. Surely you are not going from us!"

"I am but going to those who have preceded me, Bettina," he answered. "My wife, and Richard, and others, who have gone on before, are waiting for me, and I in my turn shall wait for you. This fretting life is over. How poor!—*how poor!*"—he added more emphatically, as he clasped his hands—"do even its best interests now seem beside eternity!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

LAST HOURS.

THE lamp was placed on a chest of drawers behind the chair of Dr Davenal. It was getting on for ten o'clock. Quite time, as had been suggested to him, that he should be in bed ; but he appeared unwilling to move. He felt easy, he said : and therefore he stayed on.

The flickering light of the fire, now burning with a dull red heat, now bursting up into a blaze, threw its rays upon the chamber—destined, ere that night should close, to be a chamber of death, although they, the watchers, as yet suspected it not. The light fell upon the simple bed at the far corner, destitute of hangings—for the doctor was a foe to curtains—upon the dwarf cabinet beside it, whose lower shelves enclosed a few choice books, upon the drawers, upon the dressing-table at the farther win-

dow, and upon the open space at this end where the fire was. The light fell on the doctor as he lay back in the gaudy dressing-gown, on the chair-pillow, one hand hanging down listlessly, the other fondly resting on the soft brown hair of his daughter.

She sat on a footstool by his side, nestled close to him. Her head bowed down, for she had much ado to conceal and subdue her emotion, her hands clasped and laid upon his knee. The dread fear that he was dying rested on her heart; had come to it, as it seemed, by intuition. Not a word yet of this ominous dread had been spoken between them; each seemed to shrink from the task. But Sara strove to gather courage and strength, so that in his presence she might at least not give way.

The doctor stretched out his disengaged hand and pointed to a china cup that stood on the table. Sara rose and brought it to him, and he took a few spoonfuls of the refreshment it contained.

"Is not the fire getting low, my dear?" he asked with a slight shiver.

She rose and stirred it, brought forward the coal-box and put on fresh coal, and then took the hearth-brush and swept the bars and the hearth, making things comfortable.

"Do you feel cold, papa?"

"I think so," he answered with another shiver.

"I am sure you would be better in bed. Shall I call Neal?"

"Not yet. Come and sit down again."

She took her place, nestling to him as before, and he fondly stroked her head with his feeble hand. It seemed to her that the hand grew feebler with every change, every fresh movement.

"I have a few things to say to you, my dear, and I had better say them now. I should not like to go to sleep with them unspoken."

Did he mean the sleep of death? Sara trembled inwardly: she hoped that she should retain sufficient strength, no matter at what cost to her feelings, not to tremble outwardly.

"It was necessary that I should make a fresh will," he began after a pause. "In the old will——"

"Oh papa! surely you are not going from me!"

Utterly unnerved, the words had broken from her in her misery. Dr Davenal resumed in a tender, reasoning accent.

"I must have you brave, darling; just for a short while. Won't you try and be so? You see I have only you to speak to, Edward being away. My strength may not last very long."

She understood him: that his strength might not

hold out if she hindered him by giving way to emotion. The precious time ! not much of it might be left to them. With a mighty effort of will, with an anguished sigh to Heaven for help, Sara Davenal outwardly grew still and calm.

"Tell me all you have to tell, papa. I will try and be to you what Edward would have been."

"In the old will, made subsequent to the death of Richard, the chief part of what I had to leave was divided equally between you and Edward. Caroline—but it matters not to speak of her. In this new will, made now since this illness, all I die possessed of is bequeathed to you."

"To me !" she echoed, the injustice of the thing striking on her mind in the first blush of the words.

"Do you think, after what has happened, that Edward could have any right to it ?"

She was silent. The doctor lay still for a few moments to gather breath. His voice was so weak that she could barely catch some of the words.

"When Edward brought that ill upon us, which has gone well-nigh to kill me—which I believe in a measure has killed me, in so far as that it rendered my state of mind and body such that I have been unable to fight against what might otherwise have proved but a slight disorder—when he brought it

upon us, I say, I had only one way open to me—to sacrifice my property and save him. All fathers might not have done it, though most would : but I believe few fathers love their children as I have loved mine. But to save him, I had not only to sacrifice my property, but also in a measure to sacrifice you.”

“ Papa,” she said, lifting her head, “ I wish I might ask you something.”

“ Well—do so.”

“ If you would but trust me more entirely. When Edward came that night and you called me down, I learnt he was in some dangerous trouble ; but I learnt no further. Since then nothing but fears have haunted me.”

“ And have they not haunted me ?” echoed the doctor in a strange tone of pain. “ The night stands out in my memory like a frightful dream. Think what it was. When I was lingering in that front room there, full of the trouble brought to me by the death of Lady Oswald, not yet cold, there came a tapping at the window, and I looked out and saw Edward. Edward, my son !—disguised, as may almost be said, for he did not care to be recognised in Hallingham ; and in truth recognition might have been dangerous. ‘ Let me in quietly, father,’ he said, ‘ I am in danger.’ Sara, were I to live to be an old

man, I could not forget the effect those words had upon me. I was unnerved that evening: the recent death of Lady Oswald and—and—its unhappy circumstances were as vividly before me as though it was being enacted then, and I was unnerved to a degree not usual. He wore a cap on his head, and a plaid scarf very much up about his neck, in fact just as any gentleman might travel, but I had not been accustomed to see Edward so dressed. His voice, too, was hushed to a warning tone. 'Let me in quietly, father. I am in danger.' In the first confused moment I declare I thought of some threatened danger in the street—that some wild animal was running loose: strange ideas do occur to one in these sudden moments. I let him in, and he began hurriedly to tell me that he did not want his visit to be known, for he was absent from quarters without leave; nay, in defiance of leave, which had been denied to him as inconvenient to be granted in the hurried period of the regiment's departure. But he was compelled to see me, he continued, and—then—he told me all."

"Told you what, papa?" she whispered, when the doctor's moan of reminiscence had died away.

"Of the awful position into which his folly had plunged him. Of the crime that he had committed,

and which, if not hushed up, *bought* up, one may say, would in a few days find him out. Sara, Sara ! men have been hung for that same crime in days not so long gone by."

He, the unhappy father, stopped to wipe from his face the dewes that had gathered there. It was an awful tale for a father to tell ; it was more awful for him to have heard it. Sara shivered : she did not dare to interrupt by a single word.

" My gallant son, of whom I had been so proud ! Youth's follies had been his in plenty ; vanity, extravagance, expenditure, bringing debt in their train, which I had satisfied, more than once, over and above the handsome allowance I made him. But crime, never. Sara, when that night was over, I felt that I would rather die than live it over again, with its sudden lifting of the curtain to pain and shame."

" Papa, if ——"

" Hush, child ! Let me finish this part while I can speak. He confessed all in its fullest extent. The ice once broken, he told the whole. Indeed, he had no choice but to tell it, for it was only by knowing it entirely that I could help him. Had he concealed the half of it he might as well have concealed all : and he might have stood at his country's bar to answer for his crime."

Sara gave a great cry. Terrible as her vague doubts had been, pointing sometimes to the very darkest sin that is comprised in the Decalogue, the one which Oswald Cray had even dared to whisper in her ear, it was so much worse to hear those doubts confirmed.

"At his country's bar?"

"Child, yes. Don't I tell you what the punishment would have been for it not many years ago? What could I do but save him? Had it been necessary to part with every stick and stone I possessed in the world, I must have parted with them—anything, everything, so as to save him. I told him what I would do; that I would start before morning-light—for speed was necessary—and get to London and stop the danger. On his part he had to go back by the train that passes through here at midnight, and so be at quarters by the morrow, that his absence might not be known. Before he went he begged to see you. I think that he then—Sara, I think it now, and have for some little time—that he then had made up his mind not to come down again: or else he fancied that he should not be able to come. However that may have been, he begged to see you; and I, seeing I must confess no reason for it, called you down. And the rest you know."

"I don't know one thing," she whispered. "Papa, I don't know what it was—the crime."

"And better that you should not," he answered with a vehemence surprising in his weak state. "I would not have adverted to it at all, but for what I have to explain to you. Listen, Sara, for there are directions that I must give you now."

Pausing, he held his hand up for an instant as if to bespeak her attention, and then resumed.

"I shall startle you if I say that the money I was called upon to find was no less than eight thousand pounds. Ah! you may well lift your head, child! And this imprudent, sinful man was your brother and my son, and Heaven only knows how dearly I love him still! Five thousand of it I paid at once, and the rest I arranged to pay later, at different periods. This very Christmas, I have paid another five hundred, leaving two thousand five hundred yet to pay. I have directed that whatever I die possessed of shall be sold, and the money paid over to you, 'my daughter, Sara Davenal.' The terms of the will may excite curiosity; people will marvel why I did not appoint trustees; and you, my darling, must be content to let them marvel. The residue, after my debts are paid, will be, as I judge, about three thousand pounds. And of this, Sara,

two thousand five hundred must be given to these people, who hold Edward's safety in their hands."

Again she was startled. "Do they hold it still?"

"They do. They hold his—I may almost say life—in their hands. Once they are paid, the danger will have passed. You will make no unnecessary delay?"

"No," she said with a shudder. "The very hour the money is in my hands it shall be paid to them."

"In my desk, in the private compartment, you will find a sealed paper addressed to yourself. It contains full directions, how you must accomplish this, and who the parties are. I thought it well to write this down for you, that there might be no mistake or forgetfulness. Inside this paper you will find a letter addressed to these people, and that I wish you to post with your own hands,—*with your own hands!*—within four and twenty hours after my death. Do you clearly understand?"

Yes, she clearly understood, she answered; answered from the depths of her quivering heart.

"And I think that is all, so far as that unhappy business is concerned. Oh, my child, my child! if I could but have left you better off!"

"Papa, don't grieve for that!" she said in the midst of her choking sobs. "I shall do very well."

"You will have your home with your aunt. And Mark Cray is to pay you a certain sum for five years, which must be invested for you. Bettina will take care of you : but she is not of a cheering temper. If I could but have left you in a happier home !"

Looking forward, she felt that all homes would be pretty much alike to her with her load of grief and care. Surely the sorrows of life had fallen upon her early !

"I began to think, just about the time of Caroline's marriage, or a little before it, that Oswald Cray was growing to like you very much," resumed Dr Davenal. "But it may have been only my own fancy. I was mistaken with regard to him once before ; perhaps I also was again ?"

She sat silent, her head down, the fingers of her hands nervously entwining themselves one within the other.

"You don't answer me, Sara. It may be the last time I shall ask you anything."

"It is all over, papa," she said, lifting her streaming eyes.

"Then there was ! What has ended it ?"

Ought she to tell him ? *Could* she tell him ? Would it be right or wise to do so—to increase the sense of *ill*, wrought by her unhappy brother, already

lying with so bitter a weight, in spite of his love, on Dr Davenal's spirit? No, she thought she ought not. Her sense of right as well as her reticence of feeling shrunk from the task.

"Child, have you no answer for me?"

"Something—unpleasant—arose between us," she said, in a faltering whisper. "And so we parted. It was neither his fault nor mine; it—it was the fault of circumstances."

"Ah!" said the doctor, "a foolish quarrel. But I had thought both of you superior to it. Should the cloud ever pass away, and he wish to make you his wife, remember that you have my full and free approbation—that my blessing would go with it. In spite of his pride and his caprice, I like Oswald Cray."

"It never will pass away," she interrupted, almost with vehemence. "It is a thing impossible. We have bidden adieu to all that for ever."

"Well, you know best. I only say, if it should be. Is it this that has kept him from the house?"

"Yes. Oh papa, when you were blaming him for taking foolish and unjust offence against Lady Oswald's will, I wish you could have known what a mistake it was."

"And, Sara, I have urged on Caroline, as you

heard me, that that money should be secured to herself," he continued, passing to a different subject. "I have spoken to your aunt; I have written of it to Oswald Cray—for that is the purport of my note to him. My dear, do you reiterate the same to them by word of mouth; and say that I urged it again with my dying breath. I don't know why the necessity for this should cling to my mind so strongly," he continued in a dreamy tone. "Unless it is because I dreamt a night or two ago that Mark had run through all his means, and Caroline was lying in some strange place, ill, and in grievous poverty. It was a vivid dream; and is as present to me now as it was when I dreamt it."

Sara pressed her hands upon her face. The effort to sustain her calmness was getting beyond her strength.

"Say that I urged it again with my dying breath! And give my love to the two little boys, Sara. Tell them that Uncle Richard would have sent for them to take a last farewell, had death not come upon him so suddenly. But there's no time; and tell them we shall meet again in that far-off land, when their toils and mine shall be alike over. Charge them to be ever working on for it."

She could not contain herself longer. Her very

heart was breaking. And she turned with choking sobs, and hid her face upon his breast.

"Don't, my darling! Don't grieve hopelessly. It is God's will to take me, and therefore we should not sorrow as those without hope. I have tried of late to live very near Him, to resign myself to Him in all things. My life had become one long weary trouble, Sara—perhaps He is taking me from it in love."

"Oh papa! But I shall be left!"

"Ah, child, but you are young; life for you is only in its morning, and though clouds have gathered overhead, they may clear away again, leaving only brightness behind them. Think what it has been for me! To wake from troubled sleep in a night of pain to the dread that ere the day closed the name of my only remaining son might be in the mouths of men—a felon! Child, no wonder that I am dying."

Sara could not speak. She lifted her arm and let it fall across him. Dr Davenal laid his hand lovingly on the bowed head.

"Yes, I am resigned to die. I would have lived on longer if I could; but that is denied me, and God has reconciled me to the decree. When you shall come to be as old as I am, Sara, you will have

learnt how full of mercy are the darkest troubles, if we will but open our eyes to look for it."

Sara Davenal, in her keen distress, could not see where the mercy lay for her. To lose her father, seemed to be the very consummation of all earthly misery. How many more of us have so felt, when stern death was taking one we loved better than life!

"I am so glad I gave that money of Lady Oswald's back to the rightful owners!" he resumed, after a pause. "It has brought its comfort to me now. I am glad, too, that I have lived to see them in possession of it; that no vexatious delays were made to intervene. Had it not been settled before I died, there's no knowing what might have arisen. Sara, remember that our past acts find us out on our dying bed. Whether they have been good or evil, they come home to us then."

His voice had grown so faint that it was more by guessing than by hearing that she understood the words. Presently she looked up and saw that his eyes were closed; but his lips were in motion, and she thought he was praying. She began to wish he would get into bed, but when she attempted to move, his hand tightened around her.

"No; stay where you are. God bless you! God bless you always, my child!"

She remained on as before, her cheek resting on the dressing-gown. Presently Miss Bettina came in.

"It is the most wrong thing for you to sit up like this, Richard!" she was beginning, when she caught sight of his closed eyes. "Is he asleep, Sara? How could you let him go to sleep in his chair at this hour? He ought——What's the matter?"

Miss Bettina—calm, cold, impassive Miss Bettina—broke off with a shriek as she spoke the last words. She went closer to him and touched his forehead.

Sara rose; and a bewildering look of hopeless terror took possession of her own face as she saw that white one lying there. Richard Davenal had passed to his rest.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SORROW.

To describe the sorrow, the consternation that fell on all Hallingham in the loss of Dr Davenal, would be a fruitless task. People could not believe that he was really dead. It had been asserted that the danger was past, and he was getting better rapidly. They looked at each other in a bewildered sort of way, and asked what he had died of? Of a neglected cold, was the answer of those who knew best, or supposed they knew—the medical body of Hallingham. And indeed there was little doubt that they were correct: the immediate malady which had deprived the town of that valuable life, was a very simple thing—a cold, neglected at the onset.

Sara Davenal was stunned: stunned with the weight of the calamity, with the grief it brought. And yet it probably fell upon her with less startling

intensity than it would have done had she been in the full suntide of prosperity. She had been recently living in nothing but sorrow. The grief and terror brought to her by that night's unhappy secret (which you now know was connected with her brother), had been succeeded by the withdrawal of the friendship—to call it by a light name—of Oswald Cray. She had believed that the world could bring no other calamity that could add to her misery: she had not thought of that most grievous one—a father's death.

In all pain there must be a reaction: the very violence of the first grief induces it; and it came sooner to Sara Davenal than it does to most sufferers. Or, it may be, that the grave, the *real* nature of the grief brought its own effects. Had it been simple mourning alone, the natural sorrow for the loss of a good and loving father, she might have gone on weeping for months: but there was behind it that heritage of terror on her brother's account, there was the consciousness that with her the heavy secret was left, and the completion of its purchase. The blinding tears ceased, the lively grief settled down into one long, inward, dull agony; and ere many days went over, she had become, in manner, almost unnaturally cold and calm. "How well his daughter bears it," the town said, when it had an opportunity

of seeing her. In her subdued manner, her still face, her low, measured tones which never trembled, they read only serene resignation. Ah ! how few of us think to remember in every-day life that it is the silent grief that does its work within.

She was obliged so soon to set about her responsibilities. Dr Davenal's request to her had been to post a certain letter that she would find in his desk within four-and-twenty hours of his decease : to post it herself. On the afternoon of the day following the death, she carried the desk to her own room and examined it. There was the letter to Edward, there was the letter to Oswald Cray ; both were lying where she had placed them ; and there was the packet addressed to herself. The letter it enclosed was directed "Mr Alfred King, care of Messrs Jones and Green, Essex Street, Strand, London." The directions to herself were very clear. As soon as the money was realised she was to write and appoint an interview with Mr Alfred King, and pay over to him the two thousand five hundred pounds upon his delivering up to her certain papers, copies of which were enclosed. This interview might take place at Hallingham if Mr Alfred King would journey to it : if he declined, she would be under the necessity of going to London and meeting him at

Messrs Jones and Green's. But on no account was she to pay the money by deputy or by letter, because it was essential that she should examine the papers that would be delivered to her, and see that they tallied with the copies written down. Mr Alfred King would then have to sign a receipt, which the doctor had written and sealed up, and which, he added, she had better not unseal until the moment came for signing it. The receipt and one or two of the papers she was afterwards to re-seal and keep until the return of Edward Davenal. If Edward died abroad, then they were to be burnt.

Sara re-locked the desk ; and still she could not form any very definite idea of what Edward's crime had been. The letter to Mr Alfred King and the letter to Oswald Cray she kept out, for they must be posted ere the day should close. She went out herself at dusk and posted them ; whatever duty lay before her, she felt that she must go about it, shrinking from none. Girl though she was in years, she was beginning to feel old in sorrow : no teacher is like unto it. There are woes that bring more experience to the heart in the first night of their falling, than will half a lifetime of smooth years.

It was through the letter sent to him that Oswald Cray first learnt the death of Dr Davenal. He was

seated at his breakfast-table in Parliament Street, eyes and thoughts buried in the "Times," when Benn came in with the letters, a whole stack of them, and laid them down by his side. There Oswald let them lie: and it was only in gathering them up later to take down and open in his business-room, that his eye fell on one in particular, rather a large envelope, with a black border and a black seal. He knew the writing well, and a flush of emotion rose to his face as he opened it. Two notes were enclosed.

"MY DEAR MR OSWALD CRAY,

"I do not know whether I shall be the first to tell you of the death of my dear father. He died last night, about ten o'clock. An hour or two previously, he penned the enclosed note to you; and he bade me add a few lines when I forwarded it, to explain that when he attempted it, he was almost past writing. But that he made this an especial request, I would not have troubled you with anything from myself: indeed I am scarcely capable of writing coherently to-day, for my grief is very great.

"Believe me very sincerely yours,

"SARA DAVENAL."

The first rapid gathering-in of the general sense

over, he leaned his elbow on the table and read the words deliberately. It was just the note that her good sense would prompt her to write, under the altered relations between them. He felt that it was—but he had not witnessed her hesitation and the doubt whether she should not rather address him formally than as a friend. If those dandy clerks in the rooms below, if those grave gentlemen with whom he would be brought in contact during the day, had but seen him press those two words, "Sara Davenal," to his lips! He, the reserved, self-possessed man of business, he of the cold, proud spirit! he kissed the name as fervently as any schoolboy kisses that in his first love-letter.

And then he recollected himself; and as his wits, which had certainly gone wool-gathering, came back to him, another flush dyed his face far deeper than the last had dyed it; a flush of shame that he should have been betrayed into the folly. Besides, that was not the way to help him to forget her; as it was imperative on him that he should forget.

He took up the note of the doctor. And he could scarcely believe that that weak, scrawling writing was traced by the once bold, clear hand of Dr Davenal. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I call you so in spite of the coolness that has come between us. I would that all should be friends with me in my dying hour.

"The expected money, as you probably know, is at last to come to Caroline. I shall not be spared to urge its settlement upon herself, but do you urge it. As soon as it shall be paid over, let Mark secure it to Caroline absolutely, so that she and her children may have something to fall back upon in case of need. They are both young, both thoughtless, and, if left to themselves in the matter, will be almost sure to waste the money, so that it would do no real good to either. If Mark—I cannot write more: sight is failing.

"Fare you well, My Friend,

"R. D."

And he was dead! For a few moments, Oswald forgot all his doubts and fears of the man, and leaped back in memory to the time when he had respected him more than anybody in the world. *Had* he died with that weight of guilt upon him? *How* weighty was it? how far did it extend? It seemed strange that he should so soon have followed Lady Oswald. Had remorse hastened his death? But, in spite of these thoughts, which Oswald called

not up willingly, he did feel a deep sense of regret, of sorrow for Dr Davenal, and wished that his life might have been spared to him.

It was incumbent on him to answer the other note, and he sat down to his writing-table and drew a sheet of paper towards him, and began :

"MY DEAR——"

There he stopped. How should he address her ? My dear Miss Davenal ?—or My dear Sara ? The one seemed too formal, considering how long he had called her Sara, considering that the present moment of deep sorrow should make all her friends especially tender to her. But yet—My dear Sara—better perhaps that he should not. So he finally began :

"MY DEAR MISS DAVENAL,

"I do indeed heartily sympathise with you in your great affliction. I wish for your sake and his that the doctor's life had been spared. You do not give me any particulars—and I could not at such a moment expect them—but I fear his death must have been sudden. Will you allow me to exercise the privilege of a friend, in begging you to endeavour to bear up as bravely as it is possible for you to do, in these the first keen moments of grief. When

next at Hallingham, I will with your permission call on you and Miss Davenal, and express to you in person my heartfelt sympathy. Meanwhile believe me now and always your truly sincere friend,

“O. OSWALD CRAY.

“Miss Sara Davenal.”

“Of course Mark must settle it upon her!” he said to himself as he glanced again at the contents of the doctor’s note to him. “It is not to be supposed he would do otherwise. However, I’ll mention it when I go next to Hallingham.”

And, gathering the papers together, he locked them in his private desk, and went down to enter on his day’s work, carrying the rest of the letters in his hand.

On the day subsequent to the interment of Dr Davenal, Sara told her aunt she should go and see the two little boys. It had been her wish that they should be sent for to attend the funeral, but Miss Davenal objected: they were over young, she considered. Sara was too really miserable to care about it: of what little moment do trifles seem when the mind is ill at ease.

Miss Davenal again objected to her visit. In fact, had lookers-on been gifted with prevision, they

might have seen that the opinions and course of herself and niece would be henceforth somewhat antagonistic to each other. She objected to Sara's proposed visit, recommending her to defer it for a week or two.

"But, aunt, I want to see them," urged Sara. "I know how grieved they have been : though Dick is random and light-headed, he has a most tender heart. And papa gave me a dying message to deliver to them."

"I say that it is too soon to go," repeated Miss Davenal. "A pretty thing for you to be seen gadding about out of doors the very day after your poor papa is taken from the house."

"Oh, aunt ! Gadding ! I——" for a moment she struggled with her tears : the thought of the terrible weight of sorrow she must carry out with her wherever she went, presented such a contrast to the word. At home or out, she was ever living in her breaking heart : and it appeared of little consequence what the world might say. She believed it was her duty to see the boys as soon as possible, and she had fully resolved that her duty, in all ways, should be performed to the uttermost, Heaven helping her.

"I must go, aunt," she said. "I think I am doing right."

She walked in her deep mourning, with her crape veil over her face, to the station. One of the porters got her ticket for her and saw her into the carriage. Whether by the good-feeling of the man, or not, she did not know, but no one else was put into the same compartment. She felt quite grateful to the man, as the train steamed on, and she lay back on the well-padded seat.

The train was express, and she reached the station where she was to descend in less than an hour and a half. Dr Keen's house was very near. To gain its front entrance she had to pass the large playground. The boys were out for their mid-day play, and Dick Davenal's roving eye caught sight of her. He climbed over the railings, in spite of rules, and burst into tears as he laid hold of her. Sara had pictured the two boys in apple-pie order in their new mourning, quiet and subdued; but here they were in their ordinary clothes, dirty and dusty, and Dick had a woful rent in one knee.

"Oh, Sara! is it all true? Is he really dead and buried? Couldn't he cure himself?"

She subdued her own emotion—it was only in accordance with the line she had laid down for herself. She kissed the boy in the face of the sea of eyes peering through the rails, and held him near as

they advanced to the house. Leo, less daring than Dick, had gone round by the gate, and Sara drew him on her other side as he came running up.

She sat down in the room to which she was shown, holding the sobbing boys to her. As she had said to her aunt, Dick had a tender heart, and his sobs were loud and passionate. Leo cried with him. She waited to let their emotion have vent, holding their hands, bending now and again her face against theirs.

"*Couldn't* he be cured, Sara?"

"No, dears, he could not be cured. It was God's will to take him."

"Why didn't you have us home? Why didn't you let us say good-bye to him?"

"There was no time. We thought he was getting better, and it was only quite at the very last we knew he was dying. He did not forget you and Leo, Dick. He bade me tell you—they were his own words—that Uncle Richard would have sent for you to take a last farewell, but that death came upon him too suddenly. He bade me tell you that you will meet him in that far-off land where your toils and his will be alike over; and—listen, children!—he charged you to be ever working on for it."

Their sobs came forth again. Leo was the first to speak. "Have you written to Barbadoes to tell papa?"

"Aunt Bettina has. See, dears, here are two silver pencil-cases; they were both your Uncle Richard's. The one has his crest on it; the other his initials, R. D. I thought you would like to have some little remembrance of him, and I brought them. Which will you choose, Dick? You are the eldest."

Dick took the pencils in his hand and decided on the largest, the one that bore the initials. The stone was a beautiful one, a sapphire.

"Is it real, Sara?"

"Oh yes. This is the best for you, as the initials would not stand for Leo. The other stone is real, too, Leo: opal. Try and not lose them."

"I'll never lose mine," avowed Dick. Leo only shook his head in answer, as he put the memento in his pocket.

The gifts had created a diversion, and the tears began to dry upon their faces: schoolboys' tears are not very deep. Sara spoke of their mourning, inquiring why it was not on.

"We wore it yesterday," said Dick. "And we had holiday, we two, and stopped in Mrs Keen's parlour instead of going into school. But the house-

keeper told us to put our other clothes on this morning; she said if we wore our black suit every day, it would be done for in a week."

Not unlikely—by the specimen of the present suit Mr Dick wore. Sara pointed to the rent in the knee.

"I know," said Dick, looking carelessly down at it. "I did it only just before I saw you, wrestling with a fellow. He says he's stronger than I am, but he isn't, so we were trying which was best man. All in good part, you know. I say, Sara, shall we come home for the holidays now, as we used to?"

"My dears, I don't know yet much about the future. It will be Aunt Bettina's home now. I think she will be sure to have you as usual."

"Why won't it be your home?" cried Dick, quickly.

"I shall live with Aunt Bettina. It will not be the same home for either of us—not the same house, I mean. I think—I don't know yet, but I think it likely Mr Cray and Caroline will come to it. Perhaps Aunt Bettina will go to one of her own houses."

"Why can't you and Aunt Bettina stop in that?"

"It is too large for us. And the things are going to be sold."

"The things going to be sold?" repeated Dick, lifting his eyes and voice in amazement.

"Papa has so directed in his will. You know—at least I daresay you have heard—that Aunt Bettina has a great deal of very nice furniture which has been lying by in a warehouse ever since she came to live with us. I can't tell you yet how things will be settled."

"I say, Sara, how slow and quiet you speak! And how pale you are!"

Sara swallowed down a lump in her throat. "Papa was all I had left to me, Dick. Leo, my dear, you are quiet and pale, too!"

"I say, Sara—never mind Leo, he's all right—have you got a great fortune left you? The boys here were saying you'd have such a lot: you and the captain between you."

"The boys were mistaken, Dick. Papa has not died rich. He died something else, Dick—a good man. That is better than dying rich."

"If he wasn't rich, why did he give back that money that Lady Oswald left him?"

"Oh, Dick! Do you know that the remembrance of having given back that money was one of his consolations in dying. Dick, dear, he hoped you would work on always for that better world. But the acquiring money wrongfully, or the keeping it unjustly, would not, I think, help you on your road to it."

They were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs Keen, a kind, motherly woman. She insisted on Sara's taking off her bonnet and partaking of some refreshment. Sara yielded: choosing bread-and-butter and a cup of coffee. And Mrs Keen and Dick and Leo afterwards walked with her back to the station.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WORK FOR THE FUTURE.

THE clocks were striking four when Sara Davenal was walking through the streets of Hallingham on her return. She stepped along rapidly, her crape veil over her face, and was molested by none with greetings or condolences: but she stopped of her own accord on meeting the poor market-woman, Mrs Hundley. The woman, her face broken by sorrow, flung up her hands before Sara could speak.

"To think that he should have been the first to go!—before my poor boy, whose life, as may be said, he had been keeping in him! The one a-dying for months past, the other a hale gentleman as seemed to have health in him for a lifetime. Oh, miss! what will the sick do without him?"

"How is your son?" was all Sara's answer.

"He has come nearly to his last, miss. Another

week 'll see the end." When the news come out to us that the good Dr Davenal was gone, we couldn't believe it: and my boy, he says, 'Mother, it can't be; it can't never be.' And he set on and sobbed like a child."

In spite of her efforts, the tears overflowed Sara's eyes. To have it thus brought palpably before her was more than she could bear with equanimity. "Papa is better off," was all she murmured.

"Ay, he's better off: if ever a man had done his best in this world, miss, it was him. But who'll be found to take his place?"

With the full sense of the last question echoing on her ear, Sara continued her way. At the top of the lane contiguous to their residence was Roger, standing in disconsolate idleness. With the death of his master, Roger's occupation was gone.

Sara spoke a kind word to him in passing, and met Mr Wheatley coming out at the gate, her father's close friend of many years. A surgeon once, but retired from the profession now. He it was who was named the sole executor to the doctor's will.

The will, which was causing surprise to the curious in Hallingham, had been made in the doctor's recent illness. It directed that all property he died possessed of should be sold, and the money

realised be paid at once to his daughter. Everything was left to her. In the previous will, destroyed to make room for this, Edward Davenal's name had been associated with Mr Wheatley's : in this Mr Wheatley was left sole executor ; in fact, Edward's name was not so much as mentioned in it.

"Have you been calling on my aunt, Mr Wheatley?"

"No, my visit was to you," he answered, as he turned indoors with her.

"I have been to see Dick and Leo," she explained. "My aunt thought I ought not to go out so soon ; that people might remark upon it. But I am glad I went, poor boys!"

"People remark upon it!" echoed Mr Wheatley. "I should like to hear them. What is there to remark upon in that? Miss Sara, I have gone through life just doing the thing I pleased according to my own notions of right, without reference to what other folks might think, and I have found it answer. You do the same, and never fear."

She led the way into the dining-room, and closed the door. She understood he wished to speak with her. The fire was burning itself out to an empty room, Miss Davenal being up-stairs. Ah, how changed the house was only in the short week or

two ! It would never more be alive with the tread of patients coming to consult Dr Davenal ; never more be cheered with his voice echoing through the corridors. The dwelling's occupation, like Roger's, had gone.

Mr Wheatley sat down in the chair that had once been the doctor's, and Sara untied her bonnet strings, and took a seat near him. The fresh newspapers, not unfolded, lay on the table as of yore : the whilom readers of them, the waiting sick, had ceased their visits for ever.

" Now, Miss Sara, I'm left sole executor to this will, as you heard read out yesterday," he began. " It states—I daresay you noted it—that things were to be disposed of with all convenient dispatch. Did you observe that clause ? "

" Yes."

" Very good. Besides that, in the last interview I held with my poor friend—it was the afternoon of the day he died, as you may remember—he enjoined the same thing upon me ; no delay. There was a necessity, he said, for your being put in possession of the money as soon as possible."

Sara had no ready answer at hand. She believed there might be that necessity, but did not like to acknowledge it. She took off her bonnet, and laid

it beside her on the table, as if at a loss for something to do.

"Now I don't want to inquire into reasons and motives," went on Mr Wheatley. "I'd rather not inquire into them or hear them; what your father did not see fit to tell me, I'd prefer that nobody else should tell me. I am sure of one thing: that he kept it from me either out of necessity or to spare me pain. That things had not gone very straight with him, he told me; and that, coupled with the curious will, leaving everything to you without the protection of trustees or else, does of course force me to see that there's something behind the scenes. But while I admit so much, I repeat that I do not speculate upon what it may be, even in my own mind; nor do I wish to do so. One question I must ask you—were you in your father's confidence?"

"Yes. At least, if not quite entirely, sufficiently so to carry out all his directions and wishes. But, indeed, I may say I was in his confidence," she added with less hesitation. "He talked to me a great deal the night of his death."

"And you will be at no loss what to do with the money that shall be realised."

"None."

"That's all straight then, and I know how to set

to work. My dear, it was necessary that I should just say so far, for it would not have been well for us to work at cross purposes, and I am sure you do not misunderstand me. There's something behind which is no more your secret than it is mine; it was the doctor's; and we need not further allude to it. I'll carry out his will, and you'll carry out his wishes afterwards: he hinted to me that the money would have an ulterior destination. Any suggestion you may have to make to me, you will now do with more ease than if you had supposed I was under the impression that the money was only going to you. Don't you think it was better that I should speak?"

"Indeed it was, and I thank you."

"Well, now to business. As I understand it, there's a necessity, perhaps an imperative one—in fact, the doctor told me so, for immediate action. The first consideration then is, when shall you be prepared to leave the house? Measures will be taken to put it up for sale, and there's not the least doubt of its finding a ready purchaser, for it's one of the best houses in Hallingham, and in its best part. That will be easy. The next thing will be the sale of the effects. Of course the sooner you leave the house, the sooner they can be sold."

It quite wrung her heart to hear him speak of all this in the dry tone of a man of business. She did what she could to bring her mind to bear it equably, heedless of the pain."

"It depends upon my aunt, Mr Wheatley. So far as I am concerned I could be out in a few days ; but she will have her home to fix upon. I had better speak to her. Papa said, when he was dying, that he thought Mark Cray ought to leave the Abbey and come here."

"Mark Cray ? Well, he has the most right to do so ; he was your father's partner. I never thought of him. Of course he will ; he'll not let it slip through his fingers. The mere taking this house would be a certain practice for any one. Mark Cray has his practice ready cut and dried to his hand, but he'll not let the house go by him."

"Mr Cray has just furnished the Abbey."

"But perhaps he—however, it will be well that somebody should see him, and ascertain what his wishes may be. It is a pity but he had money : he might purchase the house. By the way, there's that Chancery money come or coming to his wife !"

Sara shook her head. "That money is to be settled upon her. It was one of papa's last injunctions."

"Well; and how can that be better done than by buying freehold property, such as this? It will be the very thing for them, I should say. Let them buy this house and settle it upon her; it will be a capital investment. As to the furniture, if they don't care to buy that, it must be sold. Suppose you ask Miss Davenal when she shall be ready to vacate it; and, meanwhile, I'll see Mr Cray."

He was a man of prompt action, this old friend of Dr Davenal's, and he rose as he spoke, shook hands with Sara, and bustled out so hastily that even attentive Neal did not catch him up in time to close the hall-door behind him. Sara supposed he was going then and there to Mark Cray's.

She took her bonnet in her hand and went slowly up the stairs. It was not a pleasant task, this question that she had to put to her aunt, and she was glad of the little delay of even turning first into her own room to take her things off after her journey. Since the reading of the will yesterday, Miss Davenal had been in one of her most chilling moods. She had asked an explanation of Sara what was the meaning of all this, what Dr Davenal's secret was, and where the money had gone to. Sara could only evasively put her off; one of the charges enjoined on his daughter by the doctor had

been—not to place Edward in the power of his aunt.

It was not that Dr Davenal feared the loyalty and good faith of his sister ; but he knew how bitterly she would judge Edward, and he was willing to spare blame even to his guilty son. It is possible, also, that he deemed the secret safest left to Sara alone. Whatever his motive, he had said to her : “ I charge you, keep it from your Aunt Bettina ; ” and Sara had accepted the charge, and meant to act upon it. But Dr Davenal might never have left it, had he foreseen the unpleasantness it entailed on Sara.

Very curious, very cross, very deaf was Bettina Davenal, as she sat in the drawing-room at her usual occupation, knitting. Her clinging mourning robes made her figure appear thinner and taller ; and that, as you are aware, need not have been. She had seen from the window Sara come in, and she now thought she heard her footfall on the stairs ; and her neck was thrown more upright than ever, and her lips were ominously compressed. It was this general displeasure which had chiefly caused the objection she made to Sara’s visiting the boys. Sara had gone, defying her ; at least, she looked upon it in that light. Was she about to defy her in all things ?

She just looked up when Sara entered the room, and then dropped her eyelids again, never speaking. Sara stood near the window, her head shaded by the half-drawn blind.

"Well, I have been, aunt."

"Been?" grunted Miss Bettina. "Not anywhere. Where do you suppose I have been? I know propriety better than to be seen streaming abroad to-day."

Sara drew a chair to the little table on which lay her aunt's pearl basket of wool, and sat down close to her. Her pale, refined face was ominously severe, and Sara's heart seemed to faint at her task. Not at this one particular task before her, but at the heavy task altogether that her life had become. It was not by fainting, however, that she would get through it, neither was it the line of action she had carved out for herself.

"I observed that I had been to see the boys, Aunt Bettina. They both send their love to you."

"I daresay they do. Especially that impudent Dick!"

"Mrs Keen also desired to be remembered," continued Sara.

"You can send back my thanks for the honour," ironically spoke Miss Davenal. "The last time she

was at Hallingham she passed our house without calling."

"She spoke of it to-day, Aunt Bettina. She nodded to you at the window, she said, and pointed towards the station: she wished you to understand that she was pressed for time."

Aunt Bettina made no answer. She was knitting vehemently. Apparently Sara was not getting on very well.

"Mr Wheatley has been here, aunt."

"You need not tell it me. He has been dodging in and out like a dog in a fair. Anybody but he might have respected the quiet of the house on the very day after its poor master had been taken from it. He came in and went out again, and then came in again—with you. As he *had* come, he might have been polite enough to ask for me. Neal said he wanted you. Early times, I think, to begin showing people you are the house's mistress!"

It was not a promising commencement. Sara could only apply herself to her task in all deprecating meekness.

"Aunt Bettina, he came to speak about the future. I daresay he thought you would not like to be intruded upon to-day, for he wished me to talk things over with you. He was asking when

we—you—when we should be ready to vacate the house."

"To do what?" she repeated shrilly. But she heard very well. Sara was close to her and speaking in low clear tones.

"When we shall be ready to leave the house?"

"Had he not better turn us out of it to-day?" was the retort of the angry lady. "How dare he show this indecent haste?"

"Oh, aunt! You know it is only in accordance with papa's will that he has to do it. You heard it read. You read it to yourself afterwards."

"Yes, I did read it to myself afterwards: I could not believe that my brother Richard would have made such a will, and I chose to satisfy myself by reading it. Everything to be sold, indeed; as if we were so many bankrupts! Hold your tongue, Sara! Do you think I don't grieve for the loss of the best brother that ever stepped? But there are matters a-gate that I don't understand."

"There's a necessity for the things being sold, Aunt Bettina."

"He told me so before he died: *you* need not repeat it to me. Where's the money to be paid to?"

"And therefore Mr Wheatley is desirous that there should be no unnecessary delay," Sara con-

tinued, a faint colour tinging her cheek at the consciousness of evading her aunt's question. "He does not ask us to go out at once, Aunt Bettina: he only wishes to know when we shall be ready to go out."

"Then tell him from me that *I* will be no hinderance," retorted Miss Bettina, her temper rising. "To-morrow—the next day—the day after—any day he pleases, now, or in a month to come. I can get a lodging at an hour's notice."

"Aunt, *why* are you so angry with me?"

The burst came from her in her pain and vexation. She could not help feeling how unjust it was to cast this anger upon her; how little she had done to deserve it. Miss Bettina knitted on more fiercely, declining an answer.

"It is not my fault, aunt. If you knew—if you knew what I have to bear!"

"It *is* your fault, Sara Davenal. What I complain of is your fault. You are keeping this secret from me. I don't complain that they are going to sell the chairs and tables: Richard has willed it so, and there's no help for it: but I don't like to be kept in the dark as to the reason, or where the money is to go. Why don't you tell it me?"

It was a painful position for Sara. She had

always been dutiful and submissive to her aunt : far more so than her brothers or Caroline had been.

"Aunt Bettina, I cannot tell you. I wish I could."

"Do you mean to imply that you do not know it."

"No, I don't mean that. I do know it. At least, I know it partially. Papa did not tell me quite all."

Miss Bettina's usually placid chest was heaving with indignation. "And why could he not tell me, instead of you? I think I am more fit to be the depository of a disgraceful secret than you are, a child! And I expect it is a disgraceful one."

Ah, *how* disgraceful Sara knew only too well. She sat in silence, not daring to acknowledge it, not knowing what to answer.

"Once for all—will you confide it to me?"

Sara believed, as it had come to this, that it would be better if she could confide it to her; but the injunction of Dr Davenal was a bar; and, that, she felt it her duty religiously to obey. In her deep love for her father, she would not cast the onus of refusal upon him, preferring to let it rest on herself.

"Believe me, aunt, I *cannot* tell you. I am very sorry; I wish I did not know it myself. It—it was papa's secret, and I must not tell it."

In the twitching of her hands Miss Bettina contrived to throw down the ball of wool. Sara picked it up, glad of the little interlude.

"Aunt Bettina, we could not have stayed on in this large house."

"Did I say we could?" asked Miss Bettina. "Not now, when all your money's gone in ducks and drakes."

"Papa—papa could not *help* the money going," she returned, her heart swelling in the eager wish to defend him. "He could not help it, Aunt Bettina."

"I am not saying that he could. I am not casting reproach on him. It is not to be supposed, had he been able to help it, that he would have let it go. How touchy you are!"

A silence, and then Sara began. She mentioned what Mr Wheatley had said, that the house might be a good investment for the money of Caroline; and Miss Bettina, not at all a bad woman of business, was struck with the suggestion. She sat revolving it in silence, apparently only intent on her knitting. She supposed it could be so settled on Mark's wife, but she did not understand much of what the law might be. The thought struck her that this ought to be seen about at once.

"Mr Wheatley thinks it would be so much better

if these things could be taken too by whoever succeeds to the house," proceeded Sara. "So as to avoid a public auction."

Now that was one of the sore points troubling Miss Davenal—the prospect of selling the things by public auction. She had a most inveterate hatred to any such step, looking upon all sales of furniture, no matter what the cause of sale, as a humiliation. Hence the motive which had induced her to warehouse her handsome furniture instead of selling it; when, years ago, she gave up housekeeping to take up her abode at Dr Davenal's.

"Others knew that, before Mr Wheatley," she said ungraciously. "A public auction in this house! I would not stop in the town to see it. Has old Wheatley spoken to Mark?"

"It struck me he was going to Mark's when he left here," replied Sara. "I am not sure."

Miss Davenal grunted as she went on with her knitting. She herself always liked to be "sure:" so far as her deafness allowed her. Turning to glance at the timepiece, she crossed the room and opened the door. There stood Neal.

Neal at his eaves-dropping, of course. And the black robes of his mistress were so soft, her footfall so noiseless on the rich carpet, that Neal's ear for

once failed him. But he was not one to allow himself to be caught. He had the coal-box in his hand, and was apparently stooping to pick up a bit of coal that had fallen on the ground. Miss Davenal would as soon have suspected herself capable of listening at doors, as that estimable servant, Neal.

"Let the dinner be on the table to the moment, Neal," were her orders. "And I shall want you to attend me abroad afterwards."

"Are you going out, Aunt Bettina?" Sara ventured to inquire.

"Yes, I am," was the sharp answer. "But not until the shades of night shall be upon the streets."

Sara understood the covert reproach. Her aunt's manners towards her had settled into a cold, chilling reserve. Sara wondered if they would ever thaw again.

Miss Davenal made her dinner deliberately: she never hurried over anything: and went out afterwards on foot, attended by Neal. Sara judged that she was going to the Abbey, but she did not dare to ask. She, Sara, went to the drawing-room, from old custom; shivering as she stepped up the wide staircase: not from cold, but from the loneliness that seemed to pervade the house. She had not got over that sense of strange nameless dread which the pre-

sence of the dead imparts and leaves behind it. The drawing-room was lighted as usual : no alteration had been made in the habits of the house ; but as Sara glanced round its space, a nervous superstition began to creep over her. Perhaps the bravest of us have at times experienced such. A moment after, Watton appeared showing in a visitor : Mr Oswald Cray.

Every pulse of her body stood still, and then bounded onwards ; every thrill of her heart went out to him in a joyous greeting. In this dreadful sorrow and sadness, he had but been growing all the dearer.

He was still in deep mourning for Lady Oswald. He looked taller, finer, more noble than of yore, or she fancied it, as he bent a little to her and took her hand, and kept it. He saw the quiver of the slight frame ; he saw the red rose that dyed the pale cheeks with blushes, and Mr Oswald Cray knew that he was not forgotten by her, any more than she was by him. But he knew also that both of them had only one thing to do—to bury these feelings now, to condemn them to oblivion for the future. The daughter of Dr Davenal dead, could be no more a wife for him, Oswald Cray, than the daughter of Dr Davenal living, and most certainly he was the last man to be betrayed into forgetting that uncompromising fact.

The rose blush faded away, and he saw how weak and worn was her cheek ; young, fragile, almost childish she looked in her evening dress of black, the jet chain on her white shoulders. Insensibly his voice assumed a tenderness rarely used to her, as he apologised for calling at that hour : but he was only passing through the town and would leave it again that night. " I see how it is ;" he cried, " you are suffering more than is good for you."

But for the very greatest effort, the tears she had believed to have put under permanent control would have dropped then. A moment's pause for calmness, and she remembered that her hand was lying in his, withdrew it, and sat down quietly in a chair, pointing to one for him. But the forced calmness brought a sickness to her heart, a pallor to her aching brow.

"How shall I tell you of my sympathy in your deep sorrow ? I cannot express it : but you will believe me when I say that I feel it almost as you can do. It is indeed a trying time for you ; a grief which has come to you all too early."

"Yes," she gently answered, swallowing the lump that kept rising in her throat. " I have a good deal to bear."

"There is only one comfort to be felt at these

times—and that the mourner can but rarely feel,” he said, drawing his chair near to her. “It lies in the knowledge, the recollection, that Time, the great healer, will bind up the sorest wounds.”

“It can never bind up mine,” she said, speaking in the moment’s impulse. “But you are very kind ; you are very kind to try to cheer me.”

“I wish I could cheer you, I wish I could remove every sorrow under which you suffer ! No one living would be a truer friend to you than I should like to be. ‘How is Miss Davenal ?’” he continued, possibly fancying he might be saying too much, or at least that a construction he never intended might appear to belong to his words. “Watton said she was out. I suppose, in point of fact, she will not see me to-night. I know what war I wage with etiquette in being here so soon, and at this hour, and Miss Davenal is a close observer of it. Will you forgive me ?”

“Indeed I am glad to see you,” said Sara, simply. “I am doubly glad, for I feel almost ashamed to confess I was getting too nervous to be alone. My aunt is out ; she went to the Abbey as soon as dinner was over. I am glad to see you thus early,” she added, “because I have a word to say to you from—from papa.”

"Yes," said Oswald, lifting his head with slight eagerness, an unusual thing for him to do.

"In the letter he wrote to you, and which I sent—the letter you received," she continued, looking at him and pausing.

"Yes?"

"He spoke of Mrs Cray's money in it, as he told me. He wished you to interest yourself and see that it was settled upon her. When he wrote that letter, he was almost past exertion, and had to conclude it abruptly, not having said so much as he wished to say. Therefore he enjoined me to urge it upon you from him. He thought—I believe he thought that Mark Cray was inclined to be careless, and that the money might be wasted unless some one interfered. That was all."

"I shall speak to Mark. Most certainly I will urge the settlement of the money on his wife, should there be occasion for it; but I imagine Mark will naturally so settle it without any urging. It is quite incumbent on him to do so, both as a matter of prudence and that it is his wife's money, not his."

"I don't think Mark has much notion of prudence," she rejoined.

"I don't think he has, in a general way. But the

most careless would surely act in accordance with its dictates in a case like this. I am going to the Abbey presently."

"I fancy that papa thought—or wished—that you would be one of the trustees, should trustees be required."

"I should have no objection," said Oswald, after a pause. "But—to go to another subject, if you can bear me to touch upon it—was not Dr Davenal's death sudden at the last?"

"Quite at the last it was. He had some days of dangerous illness, and he rallied from it, as we all supposed. It was thought he was out of danger, and he sat up : he sat up for several hours—and died."

She spoke the words quietly, almost as she might have told of the death of one not related to her, her hands clasped on her lap, her face a little bent, her eyelids drooping. But Oswald Cray saw that it was the calmness that proceeds from that stern schooling of the heart which can only be enforced by those heavy-laden with hopeless pain.

"He died sitting up?"

"Yes. It was getting late, but he would not return to bed. He had been talking to me about many things ; I was on a low seat, my head leaning against him. He died with his arm round me."

"What a trial! What a shock it must have been!"

"I had no idea he was dead. He ceased talking, and I remained quiet, not to disturb him. My Aunt Bettina came in, and saw what had happened."

He scarcely knew what to say in answer. All comments at such a time are so grievously inadequate. He murmured some words of pity for the fate of Dr Davenal, of compassion for her.

"It is Hallingham that deserves, perhaps, most of real pity," she resumed, speaking in this matter-of-fact way that she might succeed in retaining her composure. "I do not know who will replace my father: no one, I fear, for a long while. If you knew how he is mourned——"

She stopped, perhaps at a loss for words.

"Did he suffer much?" asked Mr Oswald Cray.

"He suffered here"—touching her chest—"but the pain ceased the last day or two, and the breathing got better. He had a great deal of pain of mind—as—perhaps—you—know. He was quite resigned to die: he said God was taking him to a better home."

Still at cross purposes. Sara's hesitating avowal pointed to a different cause of mental pain from that assumed by Oswald Cray.

"Yes," he at length said, abstractedly, for neither spoke for a few minutes, "it is a loss to Hallingham. This will be sad news to write to your brother."

"It is already written. The mail has been gone a day or two. Oh yes! it will be grievous news for Edward."

The last words were spoken in a tone of intense pain. She checked it, and began talking of her aunt, of Caroline, of anything; almost as if she doubted herself. She told him she had been out that day to see the two little boys. At length he rose to leave.

"Will you not stay and take some tea? I do not suppose my aunt will be long."

He declined. He seemed to have grown more cold and formal. Until he took her hand in leaving, and then the tender tone of voice, the pleasant look of the eye shone out again.

"May Heaven be with you, Miss Davenal!—and render your future days happier than they can be just now. Fare you well! I hope to hear good news of you from time to time."

Which was of course equivalent to saying that he should not be a visitor. She had not expected that he would be. He turned back ere he gained the door.

"If I can be of service to you at any time or in any way, I hope you will not hesitate to command me. Nothing would give me so much gratification as the being of use to you, should need arise."

It was very polite, it was very kind, and at the same time very formal. Perhaps the strangest part throughout the interview to Sara's ears was that when he had called her "Miss Davenal," for it presented so great a contrast to the past: the past which was at an end for ever.

He went out, shown through the hall by Jessy, and leaving his card on the standing waiter for Miss Davenal. All *en règle*. And Sara in the large drawing-room, so dreary now, remained on in her pain, alone.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MARK'S NEW PLANS.

IN the dining-room at the Abbey, in her black robes, sat Mrs Cray at the head of her table, her elbow resting on it, and a pouting expression on her pretty face. Mark was at the foot, gobbling down his dinner with what haste he could. He had been detained so long beyond the dinner hour that Mrs Cray in despair had eaten hers ; and when Mark at length entered, he found a cold face and a cold cutlet. Mrs Cray was beginning to tire of the irregularity.

"I can't help it, Carine," he said, looking at her in a pause of his eating. "My work has been nearly doubled, you know, since the doctor died."

"But it's very tiresome, Mark !"

"It is. I am nearly sick of it."

"It is not *doubled*, your work."

"Well, no ; one speaks at random. Some of the doctor's older patients have left me : they think, I suppose, I am not sufficiently experienced. But I have a great deal to do just now ; more, in fact, than I can attend to properly."

Mark resumed his gobbling, and his wife watched him, her lips a little relaxing. Caroline Cray was one of those who must have all things go smoothly ; she could not bear to be put out, even in trifles.

"Mr Wheatley has been here, Mark," she presently said.

"What did he want?"

"Well, he wanted to see you. Something about the selling of my uncle's house."

"He is losing no time," observed Mark, acrimony in his tone. "I wonder he didn't begin about it yesterday when we were there, hearing the will read ? But what have I to do with it?"

"He wants us to take the house—to buy it, I think."

"I daresay he does," retorted Mark, after a pause of surprise. "Where's the money to come from?"

"There's that money of mine. He said it would be a good investment."

"Did he ! I wonder what business it is of his ! Carine, my dear, you and I are quite capable of

managing our own affairs, without being dictated to."

"Of course we are!" answered Carine, rather firing at the absent Mr Wheatley, as this new view was presented to her.

Mark said no more just then. He finished his dinner, and had the things taken away. Then, instead of sitting down to his wine, his usual custom, he stood up on the hearth-rug, as though he were cold—or restless. Mark Cray had been reared to extravagance in a petted home, and looked for his wine daily, as surely as any old alderman looks for it. Oswald Cray, reared without a home, and to schoolboy fare, adhered still, in a general way, to the water to which he had been trained. Oswald's plan was the most profitable, so far as the pocket was concerned, and the health, too.

"I say, Carine, I want to go to London for a day."

"To London?" echoed Carine, turning her chair to the fire, and facing Mark.

"There's the grandest opening: there's the grandest opening for a fortune to be made there. And—Carine—I think I shall quit Hallingham."

Mrs Cray's violet eyes extended themselves in the extreme of wonder. She sat staring at him.

"Caroline, I *hate* the profession, and how I came

ever to be such a fool as to go into it I cannot understand," said Mark, throwing himself on a chair as he plunged into confidence. "So long as the doctor lived, I could not well say anything about it; I did not see my way clear to do so. But things have altered now, and I think I shall give up the medical life."

"But—good gracious, Mark!—I can't understand," exclaimed Caroline, in her bewilderment, "If you give up your profession, you give up our means of living. We can't starve."

"Starve!" laughed Mark. "Can't you trust me better than that? Look here, Caroline; let us come to figures. I don't suppose I should clear at first above eight hundred a-year, or so, by the practice—"

"Oh, Mark!"

"Well, say a thousand for argument's sake. Let us assume that I net it clear. It's a nice income, no doubt, but I shall make three times that, if I go into the thing in London."

Caroline, half doubting, half eager, all bewildered, sat waiting to hear more.

"There's a splendid opportunity offered me if I give up the medical profession and embark altogether in a new line of life. I—you have heard me

“speak of my old chum Barker, have you not?” he broke off to ask.

“Barker?” she repeated. “Yes, I think I remember the name. He got into some dreadful trouble, did he not, and was sent to prison?”

“Sent to prison! how you speak of things! All that’s over and done with. His friends were wretched screws, doing him out of money that ought to have come to him, and the consequence was that Barker got into the Queen’s Bench. Half the gentlemen of England have been there some time in their lives,” added Mark, loftily, as if he were just then deeming the thing an honour. “Well, Caroline, that was over long ago, and Barker has now the most magnificent prospect before him that one can well imagine; he will be making his thousands and thousands a-year.”

“How is he going to make it?” asked Caroline.

“And he has offered me a share in it,” continued Mark, too eager to attend to irreverent questions. “He is one who knows how to stand by an old friend. *Thousands* a-year, it will be.”

“But, Mark, I ask you how he is going to make it?”

“It is connected with mines and pumping, and all that sort of thing,” lucidly explained Mark.

“Mines and pumping!”

"Caroline, dear, you cannot be expected to understand these things. *Enormous* fortunes are being made at them," continued Mark, in a rapture. "Some of the mines yield fifty thousand pounds profit the first year of working. I declare when I first heard of Barker's prospects I was fit to eat my fingers off, feeling that I was tied down to be a paltry pitiful country surgeon. Folks go ahead nowadays, Caroline. And, as Barker has generously come forward with the offer that I should join him, I think I ought to accept it in justice to you. My share the first year would be about three thousand, he computes."

"But, Mark, do you mean to say that Mr Barker has offered you three thousand a-year for nothing? I don't comprehend it at all."

"Not for nothing. I should give my services, and I should have to advance a certain sum at the onset. Talk about an investment for your money, Caroline, what investment would be equal to this?"

The words startled her for the moment. "I promised poor Uncle Richard that the money should be settled upon me, Mark. He said he urged it as much for your sake as mine."

"Of course," said Mark, with acquiescent suavity. "Where there's nothing better to do with money it

always ought to be so settled. But only look at this opening! Were your Uncle Richard in life, he would be the first to advise the investment of the money in it. Such chances don't happen every day. Caroline, I can't and I won't humdrum on, here, buried alive and worked to death, when I may take my place in the London world, a wealthy man, looked up to by society. In your interest, I will not."

"Are the mines in London?" asked Caroline.

"Good gracious, no! But the office is, where all the money transactions are carried on."

"And it is quite a sure thing, Mark?"

"It's as sure as the Bank of England. It wants a little capital to set it going, that's all. And that capital can be supplied by your money, Caroline, if you will agree to it. Hundreds of people would jump at the chance."

An utter tyro in business matters, in the ways of a needy world, imbued with unbounded faith in her husband, Caroline Cray took all in with eager and credulous ears. Little more than a child, she could be as easily persuaded as one, and she became as anxious to realise the good luck as Mark.

"Yes, I should think it is what my uncle would advise were he alive," she said. "And where should we live, Mark?"

"We'd live at the West End, Carine ; somewhere about Hyde Park. You should have your open and close carriages, and your saddle-horses and servants—everything as it ought to be. No end of good things may be enjoyed with three thousand a-year."

"Would it stop at three thousand, Mark?" she questioned, with sparkling eyes.

"I don't expect it would stop at twenty," coolly asserted Mark. "How far it would really go on to, I'm afraid to guess. In saying three thousand, I have taken quite the minimum of the first year's profits."

"Oh, Mark! don't let it escape you. Write to-night and secure it. How do you know but Barker may be giving it to somebody else?"

She was growing more eager than he. In her inexperience, she knew nothing of those miserable calamities ; failure, deceit, fruition deferred. Not that her husband was purposely deceiving her : he fully believed in the good luck he spoke of. Mark Cray's was one of those sanguine, roving natures which see an immediate fortune in every new scheme brought to them—if it be only wild enough.

"How long have you known of this, Mark?"

"Oh, a month or two. But, as you see, I would not stir in it. I should like to run up to town for a

day to meet Barker ; and, on my return, we'd set about the arrangements for leaving. There will be no more lonely dinners for you, Carine, once we are away from here. I shall not have to be beating about all hours and weathers from one patient's door to another, or dancing attendance on that precious infirmary, knowing that you are sitting at home waiting for me, and the meal getting cold."

"Oh, Mark ! how delightful it will be ! And, perhaps, you would never have risen into note as my uncle did."

"No, I never should. Dr Davenal's heart was in his profession, mine—"

Mark Cray stopped abruptly. The avowal upon his lips had been "mine recoils from it."

It was even so. He did literally recoil from his chosen profession. Unstable in all his ways, Mark had become heartily sick of the routine of a surgeon's life. And since the affair of Lady Oswald, a conviction had been gradually taking possession of him that he was entirely unfitted for it : nay, that he was incompetent. To betray his incompetency, would be to lose caste for ever in the medical world of Hallingham.

Mark Cray rose from his chair again, and stood on the rug as before, pushing back his hair from his

brow incessantly in the restlessness that was upon him. He was always restless when he thought of that past night ; or of the certainty that he might at any time be called upon to perform again what he had failed in then. It was not altogether his *skill* he doubted, for Mark Cray was a vain and self-sufficient man ; but he felt that the very-present consciousness of having broken down before, would induce a nervousness that might cause him to break down again. Had it been practicable, Mark Cray would have taken flight from Hallingham and the medical world that very hour, and hid himself away from it for ever.

“ It has become *hateful* to me, Carine ! ”

The words burst from him in the fulness of his thoughts. Both had been silent for some minutes, and they sounded quite startling in their vehemence. Mrs Cray looked up at him.

“ What do you mean, Mark ? What has ? The getting your meals so irregularly ? ”

“ Yes,” said Mark, evasively. He did not choose to say that it was his profession which had become hateful to him, lest Mrs Cray might inquire too closely why.

And, besides all this, had Mark been ever so successful in his practice, the vista opened to him of

unlimited wealth (and he really so regarded it) might have turned a steadier head than his. His friend Barker had been Mark's "chum" (you are indebted to Mark for the epithet) at Guy's Hospital, and the intimacy had lasted longer than such formed intimacies generally do last. Mr Barker was of the same stamp as Mark—hence, perhaps, the duration of the friendship ; he had practised as a surgeon for a year or two, and then found it "too slow," and had tried his hand at something else. He had been trying his hand at something else and something else ever since, and somehow the things had dropped through one after the other with various degrees of failure, one degree of which had been to land Mr Barker within the friendly walls of a debtor's prison. But he had come on his legs again ; such men generally do ; and he was now in high feather as the promoter of a grand mining company. It was this he had invited Mark to embark in ; he wrote him the most glowing accounts of the fabulous sums of money to be realised at it ; he believed in them himself ; he was, I have said, exactly the same sort of man as Mark.

One little drawback had recently presented itself to Barker : a want of ready money. Mark, in his eagerness, offered the sum coming to his wife from

the Chancery suit; they were expecting it to be paid over daily; and Mr Barker was in raptures, and painted his pictures of the future in colours gorgeous as those of a Claude Lorraine. Caroline might have felt a little startled, had she known Mark had already promised the money, without so much as consulting her. But Mark had chosen to take his own time to consult her, and Mark was doing it now. Perhaps he had felt it might be more decent to let poor Dr Davenal be put under the ground, before he spoke of applying the money in a way so diametrically opposed to his last wishes.

He drew a letter from his pocket, one received that morning, and read out its glowing promises. Mr Barker was evidently fervent in his belief of the future. Caroline listened as in a joyous dream: the imaginary scene then dancing before her eyes of their future greatness, rivalled any of the scenes of fairyland.

"You see," said Mark, "Barker—who's that?"

The entrance of a visitor into the hall had caused the interruption. Caroline bent her ear to listen.

"It is Aunt Bettina!" she exclaimed. "I am sure it is her voice, Mark. Whatever brings her here to-night?"

Mark crunched the letter into his pocket again.

"Mind, Caroline, not a word of this to her!" he exclaimed, laying his hand on his wife as she was rising. "It is not quite ready to be talked of yet."

Miss Davenal entered at once upon the subject which had brought her—their quitting the Abbey for the other house. Mark understood she had come, as it were, officially; to fix time and place and means; and he had no resource but to tell her that he did not intend to enter upon it; did not intend to embark Caroline's money in any such purpose; did not, in fact, intend to remain in Hallingham.

There ensued a battle: it was nothing less. What with Miss Davenal's indignation and what with Miss Davenal's deafness, the wordy war that supervened could be called little else. Caroline sat pretty quiet at first, taking her husband's side now and then.

"You tell me you are going to leave Hallingham, and you won't tell me where you are going, or what you are going to do, Mark Cray!" reiterated Miss Davenal.

"I'll tell you more about it when I know more myself."

"But you can tell me what it is; you can tell me where it is. Is it at one of the London hospitals?"

"It is in London," was Mark's answer, allowing the hospital to be assumed.

"Then Mark Cray, you are very wicked. And you,"—turning to Caroline—"are foolish to uphold him in it. How can you think of giving up such a practice as this?"

"I am tired of Hallingham," avowed Mark with blunt truth, for he was getting vexed.

"You are—what?" cried Miss Davenal, not catching the words.

"Sick and tired of Hallingham. And I don't care who knows it."

Miss Davenal looked at him with some curiosity. "Is he gone out of his senses, Caroline?"

"I am tired of Hallingham, too, aunt," said Caroline, audaciously. "I want to live in London."

"And the long and the short of it is, that we mean to live in London, Miss Bettina," avowed Mark. "There. I don't care that my talents should be buried in a poking country place any longer."

She looked from one to the other of them; she could not take it in. Sharp anger was rendering her ears somewhat more open than usual.

"Buried!—a poking country place! And what of the twelve or fifteen hundred a-year practice that you would lightly throw away, Mark Cray?"

"Oh, I shall do better than that in London. I have got a post offered me worth double that."

She paused a few moments. "And what are you to give for it?"

"Never mind that," said Mark.

"Yes, never mind that," rejoined Miss Bettina in a tone of bitter sarcasm. "When it comes to details, you can take refuge in 'never mind.' Do you suppose such posts are given away for nothing, Mark Cray? Who has been befooling you?"

"But it will not be given for nothing," cried Caroline, betrayed to the injudicious avowal by the partizanship of her husband. "The money that is coming to me will be devoted to it."

This was the climax. Miss Bettina Davenal was very wroth; wroth, however, more in sorrow than in anger. In vain she strove to sift the affair to the bottom; Mark baffled her questions, baffled her indignant curiosity, and—it must be confessed—his wife helped him.

She—Miss Bettina—turned away in the midst of the storm. She took up her black gloves, the only article of attire that she had removed, and drew them on her trembling hands. In the shaking of the hands alone did Bettina Davenal ever betray emotion: those firm, white, rather bony hands, usually so still and self-possessed.

"Marcus Cray, as surely as that you are standing

now before me, you will rue this work if you carry it out. When that day shall come, I beg you—I beg *you*, Caroline—to remember that I warned you of it."

She passed out without another word, and stalked down the lighted street, uncomfortably upright, Neal behind her with his ginger tread.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

IS MARK IN HIS SENSES ?

MIDWAY between the Abbey and her own home—it was in the corner just before coming to the market-place—Miss Davenal encountered Mr Oswald Cray.

“Is Mark in his senses ?” was her abrupt greeting to him, as he lifted his hat.

“What is the matter with him ?—What is he doing ?” asked Oswald, all in wonder.

Miss Davenal paused. Either she did not hear the question or she took time to recover herself to reply to it. Her face was very pale, her cold grey eyes glittered like steel in the lamplight.

“My poor brother has died young, and left this valuable practice in Mark’s hands. There are not many like unto it. The house is ready to be offered to him : altogether, the career spreading out before him is a fine one. And he is talking of throwing it

up. He is going to fling it from him as a child flings a pebble away into the sea. He says he shall quit Hallingham."

"Quit Hallingham!" repeated Oswald Cray, the last words of what she said alone making their full impression on him in his bewildered surprise. "Mark says he shall quit Hallingham?"

"He has some wild-goose scheme in his head of setting up in practice in London," said Miss Davenal, speaking in accordance with the notion she had erroneously assumed. "It is something he is about to purchase. He is going to purchase it with that money of Caroline's. But he has as surely lost his senses as that we are here."

"I cannot understand it," said Oswald. "No man in his senses would abandon such a practice as this."

"Just so. But I tell you he is not in his senses : he cannot be. I do not understand it any more than you. Perhaps you will see him?"

"I will. I am going there now. I have been calling at your house, Miss Davenal. Now that I have met you, will you let me express my deep sympathy in your sorrow for the loss you have sustained."

"Thank you, sir. It has been the greatest blow I

could have experienced, and if I have not shown it much outwardly—for it is not in my nature to show such—it has done its work on my heart. There are few men who could not have been spared in Hallingham, whether to the town or to his family, better than Dr Davenal."

"It is frequently the case," said Oswald, half abstractedly, "that those whom we think we could the least spare, are taken. Fare you well, Miss Davenal."

Oswald Cray strode on to the Abbey, the strange news puzzling him much. He did not take Mark at a disadvantage, as Miss Davenal had done. When he entered, Mark was all cool and easy, having had time to collect his wits and resolve on his course of action. That course was, not to open his lips about the scheme on hand to any other living mortal until it was ripe and ready to be acted upon. Miss Davenal's communication to Oswald rendered this somewhat difficult, but Mark did not stand on an evasion or two.

He was exceedingly surprised to see Oswald, not knowing that he was at Hallingham, and Caroline gave a little scream when he came in, in her pretty and somewhat affected manner. Oswald explained that he had not come from London, but from an-

other part of the country, and had alighted at Hallingham for two or three hours only as he passed through it. He then entered upon the strange news just communicated to him.

But Mark had his answer to it ready at hand. He talked in a mocking tone about "busybodies," he ridiculed Miss Davenal's deafness, saying that she generally heard things "double:" altogether, he contrived to blind Oswald, to convince him that the whole thing was a fable; or, rather, a mistake, partly arising from Miss Davenal's infirmity, partly from a desire on his own part to "chaff" her for her interference. How Mark Cray reconciled this to his sense of honour, let him answer.

And Oswald, perfectly truthful himself, never doubted his half-brother. But he did not wholly quit the topic. He spoke of the few words written to him by Dr Davenal when he was dying, and their purport—that he, Oswald, should urge the settlement of Mrs Cray's own money upon her. Though of course, Oswald added, there was no necessity for him to do so: Mark would naturally see for himself that it was the only thing to be done with it.

Of course he saw it, testily answered Mark, who was growing cross.

"I cannot think how Miss Davenal could have

misunderstood you as she did," proceeded Oswald. "She actually said that this money of Mrs Cray's was to be applied to the purchase of the new thing in London in which you were proposing to embark."

"Did she!" returned Mark, in a tone that one impudent schoolboy retorts upon another. "I do wonder, Oswald, that you should listen to the rubbish picked up by a deaf woman!"

"The wonder is, how she could pick it up," returned Oswald. "But I am heartily glad it is not so. Miss Davenal assumed that you must be out of your senses, Mark," he added, a smile crossing his lips: "I fear I must have arrived at the same conclusion had you really been entertaining the notion of quitting Hallingham and throwing up such a practice as this."

"I wish to goodness people would mind their own business!" exclaimed Mark, who was losing his good manners in his vexation. The communication to his wife of his new scheme had been so smoothly accomplished, that the sudden interruption of Miss Davenal and now of Oswald Cray seemed all too like a checkmate; and Mark felt as a stag driven to bay. "I am old enough to regulate my own affairs without Miss Davenal," he continued, "and I want none of her interference."

Oswald did not speak.

"And, what's more, I won't stand it," resumed Mark; "either from her or from anyone. There! And, Oswald, I hope you will excuse my saying it: although you are my elder brother and may deem you have a right to dictate to me."

"The right to advise *as a friend* only, Mark," was the reply, somewhat pointedly spoken. "Never to dictate."

Mark growled.

"With Dr Davenal's valuable practice before you, Mark, it may appear to you quite a superfluous precaution to secure the money to your wife and children," persisted Oswald. "But the chances and changes of life are so great, overwhelming families when least expected, that it behoves us all to guard those we love against them, as far as we have the power."

"Do you suppose I should not do the best for my wife that I can do?" asked Mark. "She knows I would. Be at ease, Oswald," he added in an easy tone, of which Oswald detected not the banter, "when Caroline's money shall be paid over, I'll send you notice of it. Talking of money, don't you think the doctor made a strange will?"

"I have not heard anything about his will," re-

plied Oswald. "He has died very well off, I suppose?"

"We don't think that he has died well off," interposed Caroline. "I and Mark can't quite make it out, and they do not treat us with much confidence in the matter. Whatever there is, is left to Sara."

"To Sara?"

"Every stick and stone," returned Caroline, her cheeks assuming that lovely colour that excitement was apt to bring to them, and which, to a practised eye, might have suggested a suspicion of something not sound in the constitution. "All the property he died possessed of is to be sold, even to the household furniture; and the money realised from it goes to Sara."

"And the son—Captain Davenal?"

"There's nothing left to him; not a penny piece. His name is not so much as mentioned in the will."

Oswald looked as though he could not believe it. He had thought that, of all men, Dr Davenal would have been incapable of making an unjust will.

"Look here, Oswald," interrupted Mark, speaking in that half-whispered tone that is so suggestive of mystery, "there's something under all this that we can't fathom. Caroline overheard some words dropped by Miss Davenal to the effect that Sara

was left dependent upon her, quite entirely dependent——”

“But how can that be?” interrupted Oswald. “Have you not just said that the whole property is willed to her?”

“True: but Miss Davenal did say it. It is all queer together,” concluded Mark. “Why should he have willed it all to Sara, excluding Edward?—And why should Miss Davenal assert, as she did, that Sara would be penniless, and must have a home with herself? I am sure I and Caroline don’t want their confidence,” continued Mark, in a tone of resentment that was sufficient to betray he did want it. “But I say it’s a queer will altogether. Nothing left to Edward, when it’s well known the doctor loved him as the apple of his eye! Every sixpence that can be realised by the sales is to go to Sara; to be paid into her hands absolutely, without the security of trustees, or guardian, or anything. But as to his having died the wealthy man that he was thought to be, it is quite a mistake. So far as we can make out, there was no money laid by at all.”

Oswald did not care to pursue the theme. The disposal of Dr Davenal’s property was nothing to him; and if he could not help a suspicion crossing his mind as to how the laid-by gains of years had

been spent, it was certainly not his intention to enlighten his brother Marcus. Neal had hinted at hush-money months ago, and the hint was haunting Oswald now.

"Was it not a sudden death at the last?" exclaimed Caroline.

"Very," said Oswald. "It must have been a sad shock for you all. I am sure your cousin feels it much."

"Sara? Well, I don't know. I don't think she feels it more than I do. She seems as still and calm as a statue. She never shed a tear yesterday when the will was being read: and I am sure she listened to it. I never heard a word for my sobs."

But for the melancholy subject, Oswald would have smiled at Caroline's faith in her own depth of grief. She had yet to learn the signs of real sorrow.

"She is not demonstrative, I think," he observed, alluding to Sara.

"She never was," returned Caroline: "and therefore I argue that there can be no real feeling. I have gone into hysterics ten times since the death, only thinking of it, as Mark knows: and I question if anybody has so much as seen Sara cry. I said to her yesterday, 'How collected you are! how you seem to think of everything for the future!' 'Yes,'

she answered in a dreamy sort of way, 'I have got work to do; I have got work to do.' I don't know why it should be," continued Mrs Cray, after a pause, "but in the last few months Sara seems to have altered so much; to have turned grave before her time. It is as though all her youth had gone out of her."

Oswald rose: He believed his mission had been accomplished—that there was no doubt of Mark's investing his wife's money for her benefit, in accordance with the doctor's wishes. They pressed him to remain and take some tea, but he declined: he was returning to town that night. His last words to his half-brother proved how completely he was astray.

"Mark, it would be only kind of you to set Miss Davenal right. I am sure the misapprehension was causing her serious pain."

"I'll attend to her," rejoined Mark, with a careless laugh, as he went with him to the hall door. "Good night, Oswald. A safe journey to you!"

Mark returned to his wife. He had not quite liked to use that deliberate deceit to Oswald Cray in her presence. But Mark was ingenious in sophistries, in that kind of logic which tends to "make the worse appear the better reason," and Caroline

put full faith in him as she listened to his half apology, half explanation.

"It would never have done to enlighten *him*," observed Mark. "What I have said, I said for your sake, Carine. Oswald is one who would rather let a man plod on for years on bread and cheese, than see him make a dash and raise himself at once to independence. He's a slow-going coach himself, and thinks everybody else ought to be!"

And, propping his back against the side of the mantelpiece, Mark Cray enlarged upon all the grandeur and glory of the prospect opening to him, painting its future scenes in colours so brilliant, that his wife lost herself in a trance of admiration, and wished it could all be realised with the morning light.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ENTERING ON A NEW HOME.

FOR once London was bright. A glorious spring day late in March had gladdened the spirits of the metropolitan world, dreary with the fogs and rains of the passing winter, and as the street passengers looked up at the clear blue sky, the shining sun, they said to each other that the day was a foretaste of summer.

The sun drew to its setting, and its red rays fell on the terminus of the Great Western Railway at Paddington; on all the bustle and confusion of a train just in. Amidst the various vehicles driving out of the station with their freight, was a cab, containing two ladies dressed in deep mourning, one of whom, the elder, had not recovered from the pushing about to which she had been subjected in the con-

fusion of arrival, and was protesting that she should not recover it and that there ought to be arrangements made to protect lady-travellers from such. On the box beside the driver was a—was he a gentleman, or was he a servant? If the latter, he was certainly a most superior one in looks, but the idle people standing about and casting their eyes up to the passing cabs were taking him no doubt for the former. The luggage piled up on the top of the cab and on the front seat of the inside, seemed to say that these travellers had come from a distance.

In point of fact, they had come from Hallingham, for they were no other than Miss Davenal and her niece, and the gentleman on the box was Neal. Miss Davenal kept up her choros of complaint. It had begun with the discomforts attendant on the arrival of a large train at the terminus, and it would be continued, there was little doubt, for ever and a day; for though Miss Bettina had come to London by her own free decision, she had come sorely against her will.

"Jostling! pushing! hustling! roaring! It is a *shame* that ladies should be subjected to such. Why don't they manage things better?"

"But, Aunt Bettina, you need not have been in the bustle. If you had but seated yourself in the

cab, as Neal suggested, and allowed him to see after the luggage——”

“Hold your tongue, Sara. What was one pair of eyes to look after all the luggage we have got? I chose to see to it as well as Neal; and I say that the way you get pushed about is shameful. My firm belief is, we have lost at least ten of the smaller packages.”

“No, no, aunt, they are all here; I counted them as they were brought to the cab.”

“Yes, that’s about all you are good for! counting the cabs! I’d spend my moments to a little more purpose. Good heavens! we shall be run down! If this is London, I wish I had never heard of it.”

The cab threaded its way amidst the crowded streets and its inmates’ terrors—for Sara was little less timid than her aunt—until it drew up before a small house in Pimlico; small as compared with their house at home. Miss Davenal looked up at it and gave a groan: and Neal opened the cab door.

“Is *this* the place, Neal? It is dreadfully small.”

“I think you will find it convenient, ma’am. It is better inside than out.”

Better inside than out! It was new and fresh and pleasant looking; but to poor Miss Davenal it appeared, as she had said, dreadfully small. Sara

seemed less disagreeably impressed. She had not anticipated great things : and it was of very little consequence to her where she lived now. In reality, it was rather a nice house, of moderate size ; but Miss Davenal was estimating it by comparison—as we all estimate things.

She turned herself about in the small passage in dismay. A door on the left led into the parlour, the room they would use for dining ; about four such could have been put into the dining-room at Hallingham. The staircase would scarcely admit of two abreast ; and in front of it, at the top, was the drawing-room, a light, cheerful apartment, with one large window. The furniture in these rooms was Miss Davenal's, and it crowded them inconveniently.

Dorcas, she who had lived at the Abbey with Mrs Cray, stood there with a smiling face to receive them ; and the landlady, a humble sort of person in a green-stuff gown, who had the pleasure of residing in the back kitchen and sleeping in some obscure attic, came forward also. The greater portion of the house had been taken unfurnished for Miss Davenal.

"About the bed-rooms, Dorcas?" inquired Miss Davenal, in a half-frightened tone. "Which is mine?"

"Which you please to choose, ma'am," was Dorcas's answer. "The two best chambers are the one behind the drawing-room, and the one over the drawing-room."

The room over the drawing-room was the largest and best, but Miss Davenal did not like so many stairs, and resigned it to Sara. She, Miss Davenal, turned herself about in the small back room as she had done in the passage: her own spacious chamber at home was all too present to her, and she wondered whether she should ever become reconciled to this.

Had any one told her a few short months before—nay, a few short weeks—that she should ever take up her abode in London, she had rejected the very idea as absurd, almost an impossibility. Yet here she was! come to it of her own decision, of her own accord, but in one sense terribly against her will.

Marcus Cray had carried out his plans. To the intense astonishment of Hallingham, he had rejected the valuable practice which had become his by the death of Dr Davenal, and his mode of relinquishing it had been a most foolish one. Whether he feared the remonstrances of his brother, the reproaches of Miss Davenal, or the interference of other friends of his wife, certain it is that Mark, in disposing of the practice, had gone unwisely to work. A practice

such as Dr Davenal's, if placed properly in the market, would have brought forth a host of men eager to be the purchasers, and to offer a fair and just sum for it. But of this Mark Cray allowed no chance. He privately negotiated with a friend of his, a Mr Berry, and sold him the good-will for little more than an old song.

In vain Miss Davenal said cutting things to Mark; in vain Oswald Cray, when the real truth reached him, came hastening down from London, in doubt whether Mark had not really gone mad. They could not undo the contract. It was signed and sealed, and Mr Berry had paid over the purchase-money.

Then Mark spoke out upon the subject of his London prospects; he enlarged upon their brilliancy until Miss Davenal herself was for the moment dazzled. She urged on Mark the justice of his resigning to Dr Davenal's daughter part of this purchase-money; Mark evaded it. His agreement with Dr Davenal, he said, was to pay to his daughter three hundred pounds per annum for five years; and provided he did pay it, it could be of no consequence whether he made it by doctoring or by other means: he should fulfil his bargain, and that was enough.

Mark had had it all his own way. The money expected by his wife had been paid over to him, and he kept it. It was a great deal less than was expected, for Chancery had secured its own slice out of the pie; but it was rather more than four thousand pounds. Mark was deaf to all suggestions, all entreaties; he completely ignored the last wishes of Dr Davenal; turned round on Oswald, and flatly told him it was no business of his; and carried the money to London in his pocket, when he and Caroline quitted Hallingham.

They quitted it in haste and hurry, long before things were ripe and ready for them in London, Mark remarking to his wife that the sooner they were out of that hornets' nest the better—by which term he probably distinguished Miss Davenal and a few others who had considered themselves privileged to interfere, so far as remonstrance went. Caroline more than seconded all his wishes, all he did; Mark had imbued her with his own rose-coloured views of the future, and she was eager to enter on its brightness.

The next to look out for a home was Miss Bettina Davenal. Affairs of the sales and else had not been carried out so quickly and readily as Mr Wheatley in his inexperience had anticipated, and there had

been no immediate hurry for the house to be vacated. A surgeon in the town was in treaty for it, and the furniture would have to be sold by auction. Sara wondered that her aunt did not fix upon a residence, and she feared all would be scuffle and bustle when they came to leave.

But Miss Davenal had been fixing upon one in her own mind ; at least, upon the locality for one—and that was London. Never, willingly, did Bettina Davenal forego a duty, however unpalatable it might be, and she did believe it to be her duty to follow the fortunes of Caroline, and not abandon her entirely to the mercy of her imprudent, thoughtless husband. To quit Hallingham, the home of her whole life, would be a cruel trial ; but she thought she ought to do so. And she bestowed a few bitter words upon the absent Mark for inducing the necessity.

Miss Bettina set about her plans. If there was one quality she was distinguishable for, above all others, it was obstinacy. Obstinate she was at all times, but in the cause of right or duty she could be unflinchingly so. Watton, their former upper-maid, was established in her new situation as housekeeper in the house of business in St Paul's Churchyard, and Miss Davenal wrote to her and requested her to

look out for a house or for a portion of one, and let her know about it. Mr and Mrs Cray had taken a house in Grosvenor Place, facing the Green Park, and Miss Davenal wished to be as near to them as her pocket would allow.

Watton attended to her commission. She thought that part of a handsome house would be more suitable to Miss Davenal's former position than the whole of an inferior one, and she did her best. Miss Davenal found it, as you have just seen, anything but handsome; but she had little notion of the prices asked in London, and she had limited Watton as to the house-rent she was to offer. Neal was sent up to London with the furniture, which had been warehoused for so many years; and when he returned to Hallingham, Dorcas took his place in London. Discharged by Mrs Cray, who had not chosen to take country servants with her, she had been re-engaged by Miss Davenal, whose modest household was henceforth to comprise only Dorcas and Neal. Miss Davenal would not part with Neal if she could help it; but she had been surprised at the man's ready agreement to stay in so reduced an establishment.

And so, before things were quite in readiness for them, Miss Davenal and Sara had come up. The

furniture in the house at Hallingham was being prepared for public sale, and they hastened away, not to witness the desecration. How coldly and chilly this new home struck upon both, now that they had really entered upon it, they alone could tell. Neither slept through that first night, and they arose in the morning alike unrefreshed.

Breakfast over, Sara stood at the window. In their immediate situation all the houses were private ones, but from a proximate corner she could see the bustle of the high-road and the omnibuses passing up and down. The day was bright, as the previous one had been, giving to London its best aspect, and all the world was astir.

"And now for Mark Cray and Caroline," said Miss Bettina.

It had been Miss Davenal's pleasure that Mark Cray and his wife should be kept in ignorance of this emigration of hers to London. Neal, during his brief sojourn there, and Dorcas afterwards, had been enjoined to keep strictly clear of the vicinity of their house. Having no motive to disobey, they had complied with the orders; and Mr and Mrs Cray were yet in total ignorance that their relatives were so near.

She put on her things and went out, Neal, as

usual, in attendance. Neal was well acquainted with the geography of the place, and piloted his mistress to the house in a few minutes' time: a handsome house, with stone steps and pillars before the door. Miss Davenal gazed at it with drawn-in lips.

"It cannot be this, Neal."

"Yes, ma'am, it is. Shall I ring?"

Miss Davenal pushed forward and rang, herself, an imperative peal. What right had they, she was mentally asking, to venture on so expensive a house as this must be? A footman flung open the door.

"Does Mr Cray live here?"

"Yes," said the footman with a lofty air: as of course it was incumbent on him to put on to anybody so dead to good manners as to call at that early hour. "What might your business be?"

None could put down insolence more effectually than Bettina Davenal. She gave the man a look, and swept past him.

"Show me to your mistress, man."

And somehow the man was subdued to do as he was bid, and to ask quite humbly, "What name, ma'am?"

"Miss Davenal."

He opened the door of a room on the right, and

Miss Davenal, never more haughty, never more stately, stepped into it. She saw it was of good proportions, she saw it was elegantly furnished ; and Caroline, in a flutter of black ribbons on her pretty morning toilette, was sitting toying with a late breakfast.

She started up with a scream. Believing that the lady before her was safe at Hallingham, perhaps the scream was excusable.

" Aunt ! Is it really you ? Whatever brings you in London ? "

Miss Bettina neglected the question to survey the room again. She had surveyed the hall as she came in ; she caught a glimpse of another room at the back : all fitted up fit for a duke and duchess.

" Where's Mark Cray ? " she cried.

" Mark has been gone out ages ago, aunt. He is deep in business now. The operations have begun."

" Who took this house ? " grimly asked Miss Bettina.

" I and Mark."

" And what did the furniture cost ? "

" Oh, I don't know. I don't think Mark has had the bills in yet. Why, aunt ? "

" *Why !*" returned the indignant lady, in a blaze of anger. " You and your husband are one of two

things, Caroline ; swindlers or idiots. If you think that strong language, I cannot help it."

"Aunt Bettina !" echoed the startled girl, "what are you saying ?" .

"The truth," solemnly replied Miss Bettina.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOPE DEFERRED.

SOME weeks went on. The beautiful summer weather had come, and the June sun was upon the streets.

Sara Davenal stood at her chamber window looking out on the dusty road. Not in reality seeing it; for the trouble and perplexity at her heart had not lessened, and she had fallen into that habit of gazing outwards in deep thought, noticing nothing. The same habit had characterised Dr Davenal; but at his daughter's age *he* had never known any weight of care: for years and years his path had been a smooth one—little else than sunshine. She gazed outwards on the dusty road, on the white pavement, glistening again with its heat, but saw nothing. A looker-on would have said she was an idle girl, standing there to take note of her neighbours' and the street's doings: of the trades-people

calling at the opposite houses, of the servant girls flirting with them as they gave their orders: of the water-cart splashing past the corner along the public highway, but neglecting this quiet nook: of everything, in short, there was to see and be seen. How mistaken that looker-on was, he could never know. Poor Sara Davenal might have been the sole living object on a broad desert plain, for all she saw of the moving panorama around her.

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick!” When that proverb of the wise King of Israel comes practically home to our hearts in all its stern reality, we have learnt one of the many bitter lessons of life. Perhaps few have realised it more intensely than Sara Davenal had latterly been obliged to realise it. From March to April, from April to May, from May to June, week by week, and morning by morning, she had been waiting for something that never came.

A very short while to wait for anything, some of you may be thinking; not much more than two months at the most, for it is only the beginning of the blooming summer month, and they had come to London late in March. But—I believe I said the same a chapter or two ago—a space of time is long or short according as we estimate it. Two months’ space may pass lightly over us as a fleeting summer’s

day; or it may drag its slow length along, every minute of it marking its flight upon our sick and weary hearts, with enough of agony crowded into it to make it seem a lifetime.

Sara and Miss Bettina had come up in March, and the things at Hallingham were to be sold within a few days of their departure; and in a few days after that, Sara had expected the money would be paid over to her. In her inexperience, she did not sufficiently allow for delays: yet had she been ever so experienced, she would not have supposed the delay would extend itself to this. It is not of much moment to inquire into the precise cause of this delay: it is sufficient to know that it did occur; and it gave as yet no signs that it would be speedily ended.

Sara had expected the money early in April. It did not come. "It will be up next week," she said to herself. But the next week came and did not bring it, and she wrote to Mr Wheatley. He hoped to realise in a day or two, was his somewhat incautious answer; but in truth he himself, not being a man of business, anticipated no vexatious delay. It was an unfortunate answer for Sara, for from that date she began to look for the money daily; and you have not yet to learn what impatience this daily

waiting and expecting works in the human heart. When one morning's post passed over and did not bring it or news of it, Sara counted on it for the morrow. And the morrows came and went, on and on; and Sara wrote and wrote, until she grew sick with the procrastination and the disappointment. She had waited for this money so anxiously that it had become with her a feverish longing; something like that strange disease, *mal du pays*, as it is called, which attacks the poor Swiss, exiled from their native land. Not for the sake of the money itself, was she so troubled—you know that; but from the fear of what evil the delay might bring. In reply to the letter she had forwarded to Mr Alfred King on the death of Dr Davenal, that unknown gentleman, whoever he might be, had replied in a short note and a very illegible handwriting (abounding in flourishes), that he was sorry to hear of the doctor's death, but *counted* on the fulfilment of the obligations without vexatious delay. This was addressed to Miss Sara Davenal, and reached her safely at Hallingham.

Poor Sara, in her inexperience, in her dread of what this man might have in his power touching her brother, feared he might deem two or three weeks only a "vexatious delay:" and when the two or three weeks went on, and two or three weeks to

those, and two or three weeks again, then it was that the dread within her grew into a living agony. Who Mr Alfred King might be, she knew not. On that night when she had been called down to Dr Davenal's study and found her brother there, she had gathered from some words dropped by the doctor, in his very imperfect explanation to her, that some one else had been almost equally culpable with her brother : but who this other was, whether gentleman or swindler, whether male or female, she had no means of knowing. She did not suppose it to be Mr Alfred King : she rather surmised that whoever it was must have gone away, as Edward had. Now and then she would wonder whether this Mr Alfred King could be connected with the police : but that was hardly likely. Altogether, her ideas of Mr Alfred King were extremely vague ; still she could not help dreading the man, and never thought of him without a shiver.

She did not know what to do : whether to remain passive ; or to write and explain that the money was coming, and apologise for the temporary delay. She felt an aversion to write : and she could not tell whether it might do harm or good. And so she did nothing : and the time had gone on, as you have heard, to June.

Sara stood at the window gazing into space, when her attention was awakened to outward things by

seeing the postman turn into the street with a fleet step. Could it be the *morning* postman? Yes, it must be, for the second delivery did not take place until eleven, and it was now half-past nine. Something had rendered him later than usual.

She threw up the window listlessly. So many many mornings had she watched for the post to bring this news from Hallingham, and been disappointed, that a reaction had come, and she now *looked* only for disappointment. You will understand this. The postman was dodging from one side of the road to the other with that unnecessary waste of time and walking (as it seems to the uninitiated) which must help to make postmen's legs so weary. He was at the opposite house now, superseding the butcher-boy in the good graces of the maid-servant, with whom he stayed a rather unnecessary while to talk; and now he came striding over. Sara leaned her head further out and saw him make for their gate.

And her pulses suddenly quickened. Even from that height she could discern—or fancied she could discern—that the letter was from Mr Wheatley. That gentleman always used large blue envelopes, and it was certainly one such that the man had singled out from his bundle of letters. Had it come at last? Had the joyful news of the money come?

She closed the window, and ran swiftly down the stairs, and met Neal turning from the door with the letter. That official was probably not at all obliged to her for demanding the letter from him so summarily. But he had no resource but to give it up.

It was from Mr Wheatley, and Sara carried it to her room, a bright flush of hope on her cheeks, an eager trembling on her happy fingers. Mr Wheatley did not like letter-writing, and she knew quite well that he would not have written uselessly. Opening the envelope, she found it a blank ; a blank entirely : nothing even written inside it : it had but enclosed a letter for herself, which had apparently been sent to Hallingham. Oh the bitter, bitter disappointment ! there was not a line, there was not a word from Mr Wheatley !

A conviction arose that she had seen the other handwriting before. Whose was it ?—it seemed to be made up of flourishes. Mr Alfred King's ! Her heart stood still in its fear, and seemed as if it would never go on again :—

“ Essex Street, June 1st.

“ MADAM,

“ I am sorry to have to give you notice that unless the money owing to me, and which I

have been vainly expecting these several weeks, is immediately paid, I shall be under the necessity of taking public steps in the matter : and they might not prove agreeable to Captain Davenal.

“ I am, Madam,

“ Your obedient servant,

“ ALFRED KING.

“ Miss Sara Davenal.”

So the first faint realisation of the haunting shadow of the past weeks had come ! Sara sat with the letter in her hand. She asked herself what was to be done ?—and she wished now, in a fit of vain repentance, that she had written long ago to Mr Alfred King, as it had been in her mind to do.

She must write now. She must write a note of regret and apology, telling him the exact truth—that the sale of the different effects at Hallingham and the realisation of the proceeds had taken more time than was anticipated, but that she expected the money daily—and beg of him to wait. In her feverish impatience it seemed as if every moment that elapsed until this explanation should be delivered to Mr Alfred King was fraught with danger, and she hastened to the room below, the drawing-room.

Her desk was there. It was generally kept in her

own chamber, but she had had it down the previous evening. Neal was quitting the room as she entered : he had been putting it in order for the day. Miss Davenal was in the parlour below, where she generally remained an hour or two after breakfast.

The letter—Mr Alfred King's letter—was spread open before Sara, and she sat pen in hand deliberating how she should answer it, when her aunt's voice startled her. It sounded on the stairs. Was she coming up ? Sara hastily placed the open letter in the desk, closed and locked it, and opened the drawing-room door. But in her flurry she left the key in the desk.

Miss Davenal was standing on the mat at the foot of the stairs. " Can't you hear me call ?" she asked.

" I did hear, aunt. What is it ?"

" Then you ought to have heard !" was the retort of Miss Davenal, at cross purposes as usual. " *You* are not turning deaf, I suppose ?"

" What is it, aunt ?" repeated Sara, going half-way down the stairs.

Instead of answering, Miss Davenal turned and went into the breakfast-room again. Sara could only follow her. Her aunt's manners had never relaxed to her from the sternness assumed at the time of Dr Davenal's death : cold and severe she

had remained ever since ; but she looked unusually cold and severe now.

"Shut the door," said Miss Davenal.

Sara hesitated for a moment, more in mind than action, and then she obeyed. She had left her desk, and wanted to get back to it.

"Hold this," said Miss Davenal.

She had taken her seat in her own chair, and was cutting out some article of linen clothing that looked as long as the room. Her income was a very moderate one now, and she did a good deal of sewing instead of putting it out. Sara took the stuff in her hand, and held it while her aunt cut : an interminable proceeding to an impatient helpmate, for Miss Davenal cut only about an inch at a time, and then drew a short thread and cut again.

"Won't it tear ?" asked Sara.

"It *will* wear. Did you ever know me buy linen that wouldn't wear ? I have too good an eye for linen to buy what won't wear."

"I asked, aunt, if it would not tear."

"Tear !" repeated Miss Davenal, offended at the word,—at the ignorance it betrayed. "No, it will not tear ; and I should think there's hardly a parish school child in the kingdom but would know that, without asking."

Sara, rebuked, held her part in silence. Presently Miss Davenal lifted her eyes and looked her full in the face.

"Who was that letter from this morning?"

"It was a private letter, aunt."

"A what?" snapped Miss Davenal.

Sara let fall the work, and stood fearlessly before Miss Davenal. The most gentle spirit can be aroused at times. "The letter was from a gentleman, aunt. It was a private letter to myself. Surely I am not so much of a child that I may not be trusted to receive one!"

"A pri-vate let-ter!—A gentleman!" was the amazed reiteration of Miss Bettina. "*What* do you say?"

Sara stood quite still for a moment, while the faint flush that was called up died away on her cheeks, and then she bent close to her aunt's ear, her low voice unmistakably clear and distinct.

"Aunt Bettina, you knew there was some unhappy business that papa was obliged to meet—and bear—just before he died. The letter I have received this morning bears reference to it. It is from a Mr King, but I don't know him. I should be thankful if you would not force me to these explanations: they are very painful."

Miss Bettina picked up the work, and drew at a thread until it broke. "Who is Mr King?" she asked.

"I do not indeed know. I never saw him in my life. He had to write to me just a word about the business, and I must answer him. In telling you this much, Aunt Bettina, I have told all I can tell. Pray, for papa's sake, do not ask me further."

"Well, this is a pretty state of things for the enlightened nineteenth century!" grunted Miss Bettina. "We have read of conspiracies and Rye House plots, and all the rest of it; *this* seems a plot, I think! Have you nothing more to say?"

"No, aunt," was the low, firm answer.

"Then you may go," said Miss Bettina, twitching the work out of Sara's hand. "I can do this myself."

And Sara knew that no amount of entreaty would induce her aunt to admit of help in her cutting, after that. She went up-stairs, and met Neal coming out of the drawing-room.

"I thought you had finished the room, Neal," she said, a sudden fear stealing over her as she remembered that her desk was left with the key in it.

"So I had, Miss. I came up now for this vase. My mistress said it was to be washed."

He went down-stairs carrying it : a valuable vase of Sèvres porcelain, never intrusted to the hands of anybody but Neal. It had belonged to poor Richard—was presented to him just before he went out on his unfortunate voyage. Sara walked to her desk ; it stood on the centre table. What with vases and other ornaments and superfluous articles of furniture, the room was somewhat inconveniently full. It was a good-sized room, too ; nearly square, the window facing you as you entered it, and the fireplace on the right. Opposite the fireplace was a beautiful inlaid cabinet with a plate-glass back : it had never cost less than forty pounds : but Miss Bettina had not spared money when she bought her furniture years ago. Look at the girandoles on the walls !—at the costly carpet, soft as velvet ! Opposite the window stood Sara's piano, a fine instrument, the gift of her loving father on her eighteenth birthday. Altogether, the room was an elegant one, but Miss Bettina could not have reconciled herself to any other. The parlour below was a nice room also, with its handsome sideboard and its glittering mirrors : but it was smaller than the drawing-room.

Sara stood for a moment before her desk : it *looked* exactly as she left it. She turned the key

and raised the lid, and saw that had anybody else done the same, Mr Alfred King's letter was lying face upwards, and might have been read without the slightest trouble in an instant of time. Had Neal seen the letter? Would he be likely to do such a thing as raise her desk surreptitiously? Many a servant would be in a room with an unlocked desk times and again, and never attempt to peer inside it. Was it probable that Neal had any propensity for prying into affairs that did not concern him? It all lay in that.

Vexed with herself for having allowed the chance to any one, Sara carried her desk to her chamber, and sat down and wrote her note there. But she could not get the thought quite so readily out of her head: it was most inexpedient that Neal, or any one else, should see that letter of Mr Alfred King's. There occurred to her mind something her brother Edward had once told her—about a doubt of Dr Davenal's—as to whether Neal had not opened a note of Lady Oswald's. Suddenly she thought of the doctor's desk. If *that* had been opened! In an impulse of fear she put the key into the lock.

It would not turn. Something was the matter with the lock. Had it been tampered with? Sara's face grew hot.

Turning and twisting and pulling, but all gently, she worked the key about in the lock. No, it would not open it. In the previous summer's holidays, a certain cupboard in Watton's room down-stairs declined to be opened in just the same way, and when inquiries came to be made, Master Dick Davenal boldly avowed that, wanting some jam one day, he had opened it with another cupboard key, and so had spoiled the lock. Had this lock been put out of order in the same way? The proper key to it was always about herself.

A locksmith had to be brought in to the desk. He speedily opened it, and put the lock to rights. "It was only a ward bent," he said. Sara inquired whether he thought it had been done through a strange key being put into the lock, but she did not get much satisfaction. "Like enough it might," he said, but "sometimes them wards got out of order with their own key."

"It seems quite a common lock," remarked Sara, as she paid him.

"Laws, yes! A'most any key might open that."

"What was the matter with the desk?" questioned Miss Bettina, who met the man in the passage as he was going away.

"I don't know, aunt. It would not open: such a

thing has never happened to it before. Do you remember last midsummer holidays Dick spoiled Watton's cupboard through undoing it with a false key? The man says it may have been the same case here."

And Neal, who was standing immediately opposite his young mistress, and met her eye as she spoke, heard the words with unruffled composure; not so much as a shade of change disturbing the equanimity of his impassive countenance.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN UNPLEASANT VISIT.

"SET me down at Essex Street."

The request, proffered in a sweet and timid voice, was made by a young lady who had just taken her place in an omnibus. The conductor's gracious response was to shut the door with a desperate bang, and call out "hi" to the driver—as a signal that he might go on.

The young lady was too pretty not to be stared at; but the crape veil, pertaining to her handsome mourning, was not raised from before her face, as she took her seat with that quiet self-possession which rarely forsakes the gentlewoman.

You will be at no loss to guess that it was Sara Davenal. The expedition she was bound upon was one that nothing save obligation could have forced upon her—a visit to Mr Alfred King. Her note to

that gentleman had brought forth another letter from him. It was to the effect that he could not wait longer for the money without the utmost inconvenience, but he would do himself the honour of calling upon her at eleven o'clock the following morning, to discuss the matter in person.

A most unsatisfactory, dismaying communication to Sara. To receive him in her Aunt Bettina's house was out of all question ; for that estimable lady would undoubtedly have insisted upon making a third at the interview. To have the secret brought home to her very hearth would be too fortunate an opportunity to miss acquainting herself with its nature and details, even though she had to draw the information from Mr Alfred King. Sara saw what must be done, however she might dislike it ; and she wrote a hasty note to the gentleman, saying that it would not be convenient to receive him in her own house, but she would instead wait upon him in Essex Street. Hence her unwonted omnibus journey.

The omnibus dashed along on its road. It was full, and therefore there was no loitering. Leaving Pimlico behind it, it passed Charing Cross and gained the Strand. There it stopped for somebody to get out, and Sara looked up at an exclamation made by the passenger seated immediately opposite to her next

the door, a lady apparently but little older than herself: a quiet, steady, self-possessed girl with a pleasing face and fair hair.

The passing of a gentleman on the pavement, close up to which the omnibus was drawn, had apparently caused the exclamation to escape her. His eyes in the same moment caught the fair face bent towards him from the door, and he approached. A bright smile greeted him, and he took her hand and kept it as they spoke together.

"You, Jane!" he exclaimed, and the voice, subdued though it was, bore a laughing sound. "It is about the last place I should have expected to see you in. I thought you and omnibuses were decided foes."

"But I am going a long way this morning; too far to walk," she answered. "We have had a letter from——"

She bent her face lower, and the words became indistinct. The gentleman resumed.

"And you are going to inquire about it? Well, Jane, don't be in a hurry. I'll tell you why another time. Inquire particulars if you like, but fix nothing. The fact is, I have something else in view.

"Of course we'd not fix anything without con-

sulting you," she answered, in her pleasant Scotch accent. "When will you be coming?"

"To-night, most likely. Good-by, Jane. Take care of yourself."

He released her hand, which he had been holding all the while, the conductor gave the door a bang, and the omnibus dashed on. Sara had turned white as death. A variety of emotions that she would not have cared to analyse were at conflict within her—for the voice was the voice of Oswald Cray.

And he had gone away, not seeing her. For *that* she was on some accounts thankful. He might have been as much surprised to see her in an omnibus—perhaps more so—as he was the young lady opposite; and least of all to Oswald Cray could Sara have explained the errand on which she was bent. She stole a glance at the girl's interesting face; a good and sensible face; one that might well win the regard even of Oswald Cray; and that baneful plant, jealousy, which perhaps had taken root in her heart before, suddenly shot forth its sharp tendrils into every corner. What right had she, Sara Davenal, to indulge any such passion!—had she not parted from Oswald Cray for ever?

"Did you not ask to be put down at Essex Street?"

The question aroused her from her pain. It came from the same young lady opposite, and Sara looked up with a start.

"Yes," she answered.

"Then we must have passed it, for this that we are going through is Temple Bar, and I know Essex Street is before we come to that. This young lady told you to set her down at Essex Street," she added to the conductor. And the man stopped the omnibus without offering the slightest apology.

"Thank you," said Sara to her, courteously. And she walked away with the pleasant voice ringing in her ears, and the conviction within her that it must be Jane Allister.

She walked slowly down Essex Street, looking out for the offices of Messrs Jones and Green, and soon found them. It was a large and dusty-looking house, on the right-hand side of the street, and was apparently let out to different occupants, as there were various names on the door. The top one was "Mr Carberry:" it was simply written in black letters on the door-post; the second was on a great brass plate, nearly as large as the post itself, "Jones and Green:" and there was another brass plate, which had on it "Messrs Knollys, Solicitors to the Great Chwddyn Mining Company."

Sara stood still as the last words caught her eye, arrested by surprise. It was not the unpronounceable name that drew her attention ; but the fact that this Great Chwddyn scheme was the very one in which Mark Cray had embarked ; the El Dorado of his friend Barker ; the source of Mark's present flourishing prosperity and of his future greatness.

She felt sure it was the same name, though nobody ever wrote it twice alike, and whether this, or any other, might be the correct way of spelling it, the Messrs Knollys themselves could not have told. Mark Cray and Barker, finding the word rather difficult to the tongue, had got into the habit of calling it the "Great Wheal Bang Company," as being readier than the other : "Wheal Bang" being some technical term connected with the mine ; though whether applicable to any particular stratum of its ore, or to the works, or to the mine generally, or to anything else, Sara had never yet clearly understood. "The Great Wheal Bang Mining Company," was the familiar term in Mark's mouth, and in that of others interested in the mine : so prone we are to catch up phrases ; and "The Great Wheal Bang" was certainly better for English tongues than the Great Chwddyn, with its variety of spelling in uninitiated hands. For once that Sara had heard the difficult

name, she had heard the easier one a hundred times ; nevertheless, now that her eyes fell upon it, she knew it to be that, and no other.

The fact in itself was not of moment to her, but thought is quick ; and the thought that darted across Sara's mind was, that if Messrs Knollys were the solicitors to this rich and important company, there might possibly be a chance of Mark Cray's or of his friend Barker's calling in at these offices at any moment, in which case they might see her. And that would not be at all convenient.

But there was no help for it. She could but go in ; and the chance only added another drop to the cup of pain. Most painful was it to Sara, from more causes than one, to come thus publicly to these places of business : and to come, as may be almost said, in secret ; not daring to speak of her real errand.

With her crape veil drawn more closely over her face, she stepped into the passage. A door on the left bore the words " Messrs Knollys ;" and Sara was looking around her when a young man with a paper in his hand came hastily out of it.

" Did you want Knollys's office ?" he asked, in a civil tone, noting her look of indecision.

" I want Messrs Jones and Green's."

"Up-stairs, first floor."

Sara thanked him, and passed through the inner entrance, which stood open, and ascended the stairs. In great white letters, on the door facing her at the top, she read, "Office: Jones and Green." She knocked at the door, and a middle-aged man in a seedy suit of black opened it.

"I wish to see Mr Alfred King," she said. "Is he here?"

"Mr Alfred King?" repeated the man. "He is not here now, and I don't know—Stay, I'll inquire."

Leaving her standing there, he retreated, and she heard a remote colloquy carried on in an undertone. Then he came back again.

"Mr King won't be here until twelve o'clock."

"I had an appointment with him at eleven," said Sara, wondering whether there could be any mistake.

"Perhaps so," said the man. "But he dropped us a line this morning to say he could not get here until twelve. I dare say if you come then you can see him."

He shut the door, and Sara went down-stairs again. What should she do with herself this long hour—for it was not quite eleven yet. Suddenly

she bethought herself that she would go to see Watton. St Paul's Churchyard, as Watton had told them—for she had paid Miss Davenal and Sara two or three visits since their arrival in London—was in a line with Temple Bar.

Sara walked quickly through the crowded streets. Once she stopped to look in at an attractive shop, but somebody came jostling against her, she thought purposely, and she did not stop again. She easily found the house of business where Watton now was, and its private door. Watton came forward all in surprise, and took her into a plain, comfortable sitting-room, which was her own, she said. Sara inquired if she liked the situation any better: for at first Watton had not liked it.

"Well, yes, miss, I think I do," was the woman's answer. "Use and time soften most things. There's a great deal of responsibility on me, and enough work also. What I can't get reconciled to is the dust and the noise. As to the dust and dirt, I'd never have believed in it without seeing it. Being in mourning for my late master, I have not worn white caps yet, and don't believe I ever can wear them: I'm sure I might put on three a-week and not be clean. Sometimes I wash my hands four times in a morning."

"Then think what it is for my Aunt Bettina, with her delicate hands, and her delicate lace," returned Sara. "I suppose the dirt is not quite so bad with us as it is here ; but it seems as if nothing could be worse, and my aunt makes it a perpetual grievance. Shall you remain here, Watton ?"

"I have made up my mind to try it for a twelve-month, Miss Sara," was the answer. "It's too good a situation to be given up lightly ; and it shall have a fair trial. I miss my country life ; I miss the green fields and the gossiping neighbours at Hallingham : oftentimes I wake from a dream, thinking I'm there, and then I am fit to cry with the disappointment. I fear the pleasant old times have gone away from me for ever."

"They go away from us all, Watton," was the murmured answer. "Never to return again."

"You will send the two young gentlemen to see me, Miss Sara," said Watton, as she was showing her out. "Perhaps they'd honour me by drinking tea here in the course of their holidays. My evenings are my own. Master Dick should eat as much jam as he'd like. I'd get in half a dozen pots assorted."

Sara could not forbear a smile : Dick would have gone to the other end of the kingdom for half a dozen

pots of assorted jam : but it changed to gravity as she turned to Watton.

"Watton, do you know I have been so great a coward as not to ask my aunt decisively whether she intends to have them up for the holidays. I very much fear she does not ; and therefore I shrink from asking, lest the fear should be made a certainty."

"Poor boys !" ejaculated Watton. "Well, of course it's all very different from what it was. Ah, Miss Sara ! there are too many will find cause to miss the good Dr Davenal !"

With the rebellious sorrow, called up by the words, rising in her heart, Sara walked along the hot and bustling streets again. It was a little past twelve when she reached Essex Street, and in going up the stairs she happened to turn her head, and saw, stepping quickly in at the outer door, Oswald Cray. She hoped he had not seen her ; she thought he had not ; and she hastened on, her pulses beating. What strange coincidence could have brought him there ?

Mr Alfred King had arrived. Sara was shown through a busy room into a smaller one, long and narrow, apparently partitioned off from a third room, which she did not see. The room contained a couple of chairs, a table-desk, and a slender, dandy sort of gentleman ; nothing more. He was leaning against

the table, doing something to his nails with a pen-knife, an eye-glass in his eye, and a black moustache with rings at its ends curling on his lip.

"Mr Alfred King?" she said interrogatively, for there had been no introduction.

Mr Alfred King bowed. He removed his hat, which he had been wearing, shut up the pen-knife with a flourish of his thin white hands, courteously stepped forward, and was altogether the gentleman again.

"Miss Sara Davenal, I presume?"

How Sara entered on her task, she never knew. Its nature made her feel sadly confused and diffident, as if all self-possession had gone out of her. Whatever her brother's crime might have been, she assumed that the gentleman before her had cognisance of it; and it rendered her miserably conscious in that first moment. Very much embarrassed, and aware that she was so, she apologised for the delay in the payment of the money, stated that she expected it daily, and begged of Mr King to be kind enough to wait a little longer. Just what she had stated in her letter: in fact she had nothing else to urge.

"I am exceedingly sorry to put you to the inconvenience of coming here, Miss Davenal," he said, in a courteous but drawling tone. "It is reversing the

appropriate order of things. I should have been better pleased to wait upon you."

"But I could not make it convenient to receive you," replied Sara. "The truth is," she added, in her candour, "that my aunt, Miss Davenal, with whom I live, was not made cognisant of this business; and it was my father's, Dr Davenal's, wish that she should not be."

"Ah,—I see," observed Mr Alfred King, in the same drawling tone that spoke so unpleasantly of affectation, of something not *true* in his nature. "Still I feel horribly annoyed at causing you the trouble of coming here, Miss Davenal."

"Will you be so kind as to tell me the object of the interview?" she said. "For what purpose did you wish to see me?"

"Ah, yes, to be sure. The fact is, Miss Davenal, some positive understanding must be come to, as to the precise time when the money will be paid. You cannot imagine the inconvenience to which the delay has put me: and, but for the respect I once bore Captain Davenal, I would not have remained so passive as I have done."

There was a pointed stress on the word "once" that recalled the blush into Sara's cheeks, the dread to her heart. She murmured a hope that the money

would be realised, and paid to him, ere the lapse of many days.

"You see, Miss Davenal, had the money no ulterior destination, it would not be of so much consequence," he resumed. "Were it due to myself only, I would wait with the greatest pleasure, no matter at what inconvenience; but that is not the case: it is these other parties who will not be pacified. Do you comprehend me, Miss Davenal?"

"Yes, I think so," said Sara, faintly, beginning to fear the affair was more complicated than she had thought. "Who are the parties?"

Mr Alfred King ran his white hand and its showy ring right through his black hair. "Well—I would tell you if I could, Miss Davenal: in anything that concerns myself only, you may command me as you please: but the fact is, I am not at liberty to mention the names of those parties even to you."

There was a pause, and Sara's manner for the moment grew haughtily distant. She liked his words less and less. But she recollected herself: she subdued her proud spirit. Was not Edward in his power?

"These parties have been angry at the delay," he resumed, breaking the silence that had ensued. "They have badgered the life nearly out of me over

it : excuse the term, Miss Davenal, it but expresses the fact. I assure you I have had a most difficult task to keep them from proceeding to extremities. And, in short, they won't be put off longer."

"From extremities?" she repeated, the one ominous word alone catching her ear.

Mr Alfred King looked at her, not speaking. His gaze seemed to ask her how much she knew. She did not respond to it.

"Were this unfortunate matter made public, nothing could save Captain Davenal," he resumed, in a low tone. "He is now in India, in apparent safety, but—in short, it would only be a question of time, two or three months or so. Men are brought from the ends of the world now to answer for—for crime."

Subdued as was his voice, Sara looked around in terror. That partition, if nothing more than a partition, was probably a shallow one, allowing sound to pass beyond it.

"Be at ease," he said, detecting her fear, "we are quite alone."

"Do you know Captain Davenal?" she asked.

"Very well indeed. He and I were at one time sworn friends, constantly together. Until this unhappy affair arose to part us."

Perhaps she would have liked to ask the particulars that she did not know. But her whole heart revolted from it ; it would have seemed like *acknowledging* Edward's crime.

"You see his being in India is only a temporary safeguard, and these parties who hold his safety in their hands might bring him home if they chose. It is only in compliance with my urgent entreaties that they have kept passive so long. But the delay is extending itself beyond all reason, and they—in short, Miss Davenal, they will not wait longer."

"But what can I do?" she urged in her helplessness. "I admit that the delay is vexatious—Heaven knows *I* have felt it so," she added, with a burst of feeling that would not be suppressed—"but the money *is there* ; it will very shortly be forthcoming, and then it will be paid."

"Yes, I have pointed out all this to them," he said, flicking a speck of dirt off his coat. "I—I suppose there is no foreign delay or obstruction, beyond the delay caused by realising the different monies?"

His sudden penetrating glance at her, the hidden earnestness of his tone, told Sara that this was a question of importance to him. It was nearly the only point throughout the interview which had not

borne to her ear and eye a vague and indefinite idea of something untruthful : untruthful in himself, his voice, and his words. Possibly he had sought the personal interview with the sole view of ascertaining this solitary fact. An impression that it was so, passed rapidly through her mind.

"Let me thoroughly understand you," she said, following her own thoughts rather than his words. "Tell me without reserve exactly what it is you wish to know, and I will answer you to the best of my power. There is no other cause for the delay, except that the monies have not been realised so quickly as they ought to have been ; no other cause whatever. Were you thinking that there was ?"

"I ?" and again the false, drawling tone grated harshly on her ear. "Not I, I assure you, Miss Davenal. Those parties, of whom I spoke, hinted to me that with all this delay it looked as if there were no intention to pay the money. Of course, I knew that it was nothing of the sort ; that the money *must* be paid."

"The very day that the money reaches me it will be paid to you, according to the instructions of my father, Dr Davenal," she said, impressively. "I beg you to believe this ; and to convey the assurance of it to them."

"I will do so. How much longer do you suppose the delay will extend? Can you fix any definite date for the payment?"

"I wish I could. But you see it does not rest with me. A very, very short period now will, I believe, see it settled."

Mr Alfred King mused. "I will inform them of what you say, Miss Davenal, and I do trust the period may be a short one. If protracted, I cannot answer for it that they would remain passive."

"They must be cruel men, to wish to harm Captain Davenal!"

"No," he answered. "Had they been cruel men they would not have consented *not* to harm him. It is not that, Miss Davenal; it is the money itself that is wanted; and the delay vexes them."

She was feeling desperate, and she ventured on a bold step. "In their own interest, then, they must be cautious not to harm him. Were they to do so, they would lose the money."

"Why?"

"Because I would never pay it."

Mr Alfred King glanced at her in surprise. All her timid hesitation of manner was gone, the expression of her face had changed to resolute bravery. "I do not pretend to entire acquaintance with the

details of this unhappy business, but I understand so much, Mr King—that this money *purchases* my brother's safety," she continued. "If that be imperilled, the bargain would be forfeited, and the money retained. The payment or non-payment of this money rests solely with me; and I should not keep faith with the other parties if they did not keep theirs with my dead father."

"There will be no question of their not keeping faith, provided they get their rights, Miss Davenal."

"And their rights—if you mean the money—they shall have; I trust speedily. I shall be only too glad to get the matter over."

"I'm sure I shall be," returned Mr King, in a tone that was certainly a hearty one. "It will be well for all parties; *very* well for Captain Davenal."

Sara turned to the door. Mr Alfred King took up his hat for the purpose of attending her outside.

"I am glad that you have allowed me this interview, Miss Davenal. It will be so much more satisfactory to these gentlemen now that I have seen you. Dr Davenal's death occurring as it did, was most unfortunate. By the way, did he not leave some papers behind him?"

"There are papers in my possession relating to

this affair," she answered. "I know what to do with them when the proper time shall come."

"Ah, yes, of course; doubtless," came the untrue words in their untrue tone. "Then I may rely on the very speedy receipt of this money, Miss Davenal?"

"You may rely upon having it immediately that it is paid to me. That is all, I presume, sir?"

Mr Alfred King could not say that was not all. He gallantly offered his arm to pilot her through the busy office of Messrs Jones and Green; but Miss Sara Davenal, with a gesture far more expressive of haughty pride than of gratitude, declined the honour. The interview was leaving a disagreeable impression on her mind, apart from its natural unpleasantness; and perhaps it was unreasonable of her, but she had taken an unconquerable dislike to Mr Alfred King.

The stairs seemed more busy than the lawyers' room. Men, some of them rather rough-looking ones, were passing up and down. Mr Alfred King drawled an anathema on the tenant of the second floor, Mr Carberry. Mr Carberry had only recently taken the rooms, and he appeared to have no ostensible occupation, save the receiving of a great many visitors and an occasional telegram. The visitors were supposed to be mostly in the sporting line; and

during the holding of distant races, the passages and door would be besieged by an eager and noisy crowd: as was the case on this day.

“ Three times have we had them scattered by the police,” exclaimed Mr Alfred King, unmistakably in earnest now. “ And that pest Carberry—or whatever the fellow’s name may be—can’t be got rid of for nearly a twelvemonth to come! Knollys’s have threatened to indict the landlord for a nuisance; Jones and Green have given conditional warning to quit; and it’s all of no use. The landlord went to Carberry with tears in his eyes, and told him he’d be the ruin of his house, that he’d forgive every farthing of rent, already owing, if he’d go; but Carberry coolly said he had taken it for a twelvemonth, and he should stop his twelvemonth. Miss Davenal, you cannot! Allow me!”

For Sara had come face to face with this crowd at the street-door, and commenced a struggle with them, they not being polite enough to give way in the least. Mr Alfred King seized her arm forcibly with a view of helping her, when she was as forcibly separated from him by an authoritative hand, and found herself on the arm of Mr Oswald Cray, his face a-blaze with haughty anger, as he turned it on Mr Alfred King.

"Thank you, sir," he said, all the pride of the Oswalds concentrating itself in him then. "This lady is under my charge."

And Mr Alfred King, with a somewhat subdued manner, as if he had received a check that he did not care to resist, made as polite a bow to Sara as the crowd allowed him, and disappeared from view.

Clear of the assemblage, Sara would have withdrawn her arm, but Oswald Cray held it too tightly, A moment, and he turned his face upon her, a-blaze still.

"What do you do with that man? He is not a fit acquaintance for you."

At first she could not answer. Not so much from the suddenness of the whole thing and the emotion it had brought to her, as because she did not know what explanation to give.

"In going into Knollys's office just now, I thought I saw you making your way up the stairs," he resumed. "I said to myself, that it could not be; but I was unable to get the impression from my mind, and I waited. One of Knollys's clerks said that the young lady, gone up, had inquired for Alfred King. What can have taken you to him?"

He was growing somewhat less vehement. It had been a moment to convince him that the love, which

he had safely deemed he was subduing, remained with him still in all its force. To rescue her from the undesirable companionship of Mr Alfred King, from contact with the unhallowed crowd of gambling men, he would have parted with his life.

"I was compelled to go," she murmured; "I could not help myself."

"Compelled to go up those stairs? Compelled to pay that man a visit?"

"Yes, I was. It was as distasteful to me as it could be, but I had no resource. I went there on business which no one but myself could transact. Thank you for your protection, Mr Oswald Cray."

She withdrew her arm now, and there was no opposition to it. Reason was resuming her seat in Oswald's mind, and he felt angry with himself for his excess of demonstration. All things considered, it had been scarcely wise.

"It is not at all a place for a young lady to go to," he resumed, as he walked by her side, and his manner became cold even to restraint. "The Knollys' are sufficiently respectable, but as much cannot be said for the tenants of the upper part of the house. You must not go to it again."

Once again, she knew she should have to go to it, but she fervently hoped that would close the matter.

She wished she could tell him the nature of the business that took her there. Parted though they were, she did care to stand well in the estimation of Oswald Cray ; she esteemed him still beyond any one on earth.

“ I never saw Mr Alfred King until this morning ; he is no acquaintance of mine, or ever likely to be. But he tells me he was once an intimate friend of my brother Edward’s.”

Oswald Cray’s haughty lip took an additional curl. “ He may have been looked upon as a respectable man once ; but he lost himself. He is not a desirable acquaintance for you.”

“ I could not help myself,” she answered, her cheek glowing. “ It was necessary that I should see him, and the interview could not be delegated to another.”

He made no reply : only continued by her side. Not until her house was nearly reached did he leave her. Then he stopped and held out his hand, but he had scarcely spoken a word to her all the way.

“ Thank you for your kindness,” said Sara. “ But I am very sorry you should have troubled yourself to come with me. It must have broken your day greatly.”

“Never mind ; I shall catch it up,” he answered, looking at his watch. “I do not like to see you in these London streets alone. I cannot forget that Dr Davenal was once my dear friend, and that you are his daughter.”

CHAPTER XL

A FLOURISHING COMPANY.

THE Great Wheal Bang Mining Company had its offices in a commodious and irreproachable quarter of the city. If I give the familiar name, Wheal Bang, instead of the difficult one Chwddyn, which can only be spelt from copy, letter by letter, and perhaps wrongly then, it is to save myself and my readers trouble. Not being Welsh, they might find a difficulty in arriving at the accurate pronunciation, just as I do at the spelling. The promoter of the Great Wheal Bang Mining Company, Mr Barker, occupied sumptuous apartments in Piccadilly; and his copartner in the scheme, as Mark Cray was to all intents and purposes now, flourished in his mansion in Grosvenor Place.

The offices were undeniable in their appointments. Situation, width of staircase, size of rooms, decora-

tions, furniture, attendants ; all were of the first water. People who play with the money of others do not in general go to work sparingly ; and speculative public schemes necessarily entail a large outlay. These schemes, springing up now and again in London, to the beguilement of the unwary—one in about every ten of which may succeed in the end,—have been so well described by abler pens than mine, that I might hesitate even to touch upon them, were it not that the story cannot conveniently get on without my doing so, and that I have a true tale to tell. How many hearts have been made to ache from the misery entailed by these uncertain ventures, ushered in with so much pomp and flourish, so full a promise of prosperity ; and how many heads, unable to bear the weight of the final ruin, have been laid low in the grave, God alone will ever know. They have ruined thousands in body ; they have ruined some in soul ; and the public is not yet tired of them, and perhaps will not be to the end of time.

If you never had the chance of going to bed at night a poor man, and waking up in the morning with a larger fortune than could be counted, you might have it now. You had only to enter largely into the Great Wheal Bang Company, become the

successful possessor of a number of its shares, and the thing was accomplished. For the world was running after it, and some of the applicants were successful in their request for allotments; and some were unsuccessful, and these last went away with a face as long as the Wheal Bang's own prospectus, growling out a prophecy of all manner of ill-fortune for it. Their grapes were sour. The shares were up in the market to a fabulous premium, and a man might take half a dozen into Capel Court, and come out of it with his pockets stuffed full of gold.

Mark Cray's money had effected wonders: or rather his wife's, for hers it was. A great many of these magnificent projects are nipped ignobly in the bud, through want of a little ready money to set them fairly going. But for Mrs Cray's thousands, Mr Barker's mine of gold might never have been heard of by the world, and Mr Barker's name had not attained to its enviable pre-eminence. These thousands did it all. They got up the company, they set the mine a-working, they paid for the costly offices, they dazzled the eyes of the public; they gave earnest of present wealth; they seemed to assure future success. Certainly, if any mine had ever a fair prospect of realising a golden fruition, it appeared to be the Great Wheal Bang. The working

of it had begun most promisingly, and every success was fairly looked for. In calling it a gold mine just now, you of course understood that I was speaking metaphorically : for gold mines are not yet common among us, even in Wales. This very valuable mine (as it could but turn out to be) was not rich in gold, but in lead : and, as we all know, the one is speedily converted into the other. The previous autumn, in consequence of some trifling difficulty in London, Mr Barker found it convenient to enter on a temporary sojourn at a distance ; and he penetrated to a remote district of South Wales. While there, with the good luck which that gentleman believed he was born to, and should some time realise, a vein of lead was discovered of a most promising nature. He contrived to secure a large interest in it, and undertook to get up a company for the working of it.

How he would have accomplished this, or whether he ever would have accomplished it, is doubtful, had he not found a coadjutor in Mark Cray, and an aid in Mark's money. Mark resigned the control of the money to him, and Mr Barker did not spare it. No earthly adjunct was wanting to insure the success of the scheme, provided the mine only realised its present promises.

Has anybody, who may happen to read this, ever

assisted in getting a newly-discovered mine into working order? If so, he may remember the money it cost. How it ran out of the hands like water that is poured through a broad-necked funnel, disappearing nobody knew where, and leaving little trace behind! How the pounds went, and the hundreds went, and the thousands went—if he was fortunate enough to possess thousands to go—he may not recollect without wincing, to this hour. Mark Cray's thousands went. But ere they had come quite to an end, the Great Wheal Bang Company was in full operation in London, the shareholders had answered to their calls, and the money was flowing in.

No lack of money to be feared then. And the operations at the mine were conducted on a much grander scale than heretofore, and the returns were certain to be without parallel, and Mr Barker was in a glow of triumph, and Mark Cray in a state of ecstatic delight, and the lucky shareholders leaped up sixteen scales in the ladder of society. How many set up carriages on the strength of their future riches, it is beyond my power to tell. The money flowed down to the mine, and the works went on beautifully, and the specimens of ore that came up to town were said to be more valuable than any ore ever was before. As to Mr Barker and Mark, their expenses

were not deemed worthy of a thought : with all that money going out weekly for the mine, personal expenditure was but as a drop of water in the ocean ; and of course it was unnecessary to think of limiting it. Mrs Cray, with her vanity and her love of display, was in the seventh heaven ; while Mark looked back to his prosy life at Hallingham, and wondered how he had endured it. He wondered how any of the doctors, left there, endured it, and pitied them from his heart. The thousand a-year or so he once thought to enter upon as successor to Dr Davenal, was recollected with contempt now.

This much must be said for the Great Wheel Bang Company—that its projectors were at least honest in their belief of its genuineness. In that, they differed from some other companies we have heard of, which have turned out to be nothing but a swindle—if you will excuse the word—from the earliest commencement, the very first dawning dream of their projectors. Mr Barker was of that strangely sanguine nature which sees a fortune in the wildest scheme, and plunges head and heart and creed into the most improbable speculation : Mark, an utter tyro in mines, and all that concerns them, including companies, saw only with Barker's eyes. When Mr Barker assured the entranced shareholders

that one hundred pounds put into the Great Wheal Bang would multiply tenfold and tenfold, he spoke only the sanguine belief of his heart. When Mark Cray declared to his brother Oswald that a thousand pounds embarked in it by him would make him a rich man for life, he asserted the honest truth according to his conviction. No wonder the two gentlemen-promoters were eloquent.

Mark had made several visits to the scene of the mines, and he came back each time with (if possible) renewed assurance of the brilliant future; with increased ardour. Had the Chancellor of the Exchequer obligingly made Mark an impromptu present of a hundred thousand pounds, Mark would have flung it broadcast into the mine, did the mine thirst for it. He did not understand these things in the least; and the perpetual bustle going on, the number of the miners, even the very money paid in wages and such like expenses, were to Mark only an earnest of the rich returns that were to come hereafter. Mark would go back to London in a glowing state, and send his friends the shareholders into a fever, longing to realise the prosperity that seemed so close at hand. The weekly reports overshadowed other weekly reports with envy, and created a *furor* in the speculating world. Some of the shareholders

who understood mines, or thought they did, better than Mark, went down to the Principality, and examined into the state of things for themselves; they found them quite satisfactory, and came away as charmed as Mark. In point of fact, prospects did look well; the lead was of an unusually good quality, and there seemed no reason whatever to anticipate anything but success. Caroline had accompanied her husband once to the mines; but the stay there (putting prospects aside) did not please her: it was "rough," she told Mark, and it was very dull at the little inn; and she was glad to come away from it all ere the second day was over.

Perhaps the only person within the circle of Mark Cray's acquaintance not bitten by the Wheal Bang fever, was Miss Davenal. Even Oswald Cray was to succumb at last. He would not become a shareholder; he was too cautious a man to enter upon possible future liabilities, the extent of which no human being could foretell; but he did feel inclined to put a thousand pounds into Mark's hands, and tell him to do the best with it. It may almost be said that Oswald was worried into doing this. Mark would not let him rest. At the onset of the affair, when the glorious prospects of the Wheal Bang were first astonishing the world, Mark had

urged Oswald to become one of them ; a director, or at least a shareholder ; but Oswald had turned a deaf ear. He felt greatly vexed at Mark's imprudence at abandoning Hallingham and his profession, leaving a certainty for an uncertainty ; he felt more than vexed at the manner in which Mrs Cray's money was disposed of, so entirely opposed to the dying injunction of Dr Davenal, so opposed (Oswald deemed) to all wisdom and prudence ; and he set his face resolutely against the Wheal Bang. But Oswald was but mortal. As the weeks and months went on, and the mines became to all appearance valuable, the company flourishing, and Mark, in conjunction with others, dinned for ever into his ear the fortune he might make at it, Oswald began to waver. He had a thousand pounds laid by, and he felt half inclined to risk it ; Mark over-persuaded him ; and his visit to the Messrs Knollys's office the day he encountered Sara Davenal, was for the purpose of making certain inquiries of those gentlemen relating to the Wheal Bang.

Not so with Miss Bettina Davenal. She set her face resolutely against the Great Wheal Bang from the first, and nothing turned her. She had never forgiven Mark and his wife for quitting Hallingham, and her reproaches to them could not cease. The

apparent prosperity of the Great Wheal Bang changed not her opinion in the least. Mark asked her once whether she would take shares in it, and produced a Wheal Bang prospectus to point to its merits. She angrily replied that she would as soon throw her money into the Thames, that it would not be a surer way of getting rid of it, and rang the bell for Mark and his prospectus to be shown out of her house.

Mark Cray sat in the board room at the city offices of the Great Wheal Bang. A noble room, the cloth on its long table of the freshest green and the finest texture. Mark leaned his elbow upon this cloth as he talked and laughed with some of the friends of the Great Wheal Bang, who were getting rich so easily. It was not a board day ; but visitors were numerous at all times.

"I had a line from him this morning," said Mark, continuing the conversation. "Spirits? I should think he does write in spirits!—what are you talking of? They are getting up quantities of ore now. It will soon be ready for the market."

"And its quality does not deteriorate?" asked Mark's immediate listener, a middle-aged gentleman with wise-looking spectacles on his nose.

"Deteriorate!" repeated Mark. "But you shall see the letter." He began to turn over the papers

on the table, and the diamond ring on his little finger, a hundred guinea investment of his, began to show out the colours of a prism in its glittering brilliancy.

"It is of no consequence," returned the gentleman, when Mark could not readily find it. "I can take your word. When does Barker come up again?"

"To-day or to-morrow; I am not sure which. I should like you to have seen his letter, though it is but a line or two. The only motive for our fresh call upon the shareholders is to hasten the operations, and so speed the returns. With more capital afloat, we can increase the workers at the mine, and bring the ore out more quickly."

"It was to have been in the market by this."

"One cannot calculate to a day. It won't be long now; and its richness, when it does come, will astonish the world. Do just as you like: take the shares or leave them. This gentleman would not have had them to dispose of, but that he has urgent need of the money. He is over in Austria now, and has written to me: he is an old friend of mine."

"I'd not hesitate a moment to take them, were it my own money; I wish I had more to embark in it. But this is money belonging to my wards; and their

relatives are so anxious that I should choose a safe investment, one in which there can be no risk."

Mark Cray rose from his seat. The word "risk" offended his pride, and he could only wonder that any one could be idiot enough to use it in connection with the Great Wheal Bang Mine. But Mark had no need to solicit now the taking of shares: half London was ready to snap them up: and he was too great a man to permit his time to be wasted unnecessarily.

"Consider over it, if you please, until to-morrow morning, Mr Gilham," he said, as he moved away. "You can see the secretary if you come in before ten. After that, the shares will not be disposable."

There's no safer way to make a buyer eager, than for a seller to be indifferent; and Mr Gilham and his spectacles went hastening after Mark, ready to close the bargain. But Mark was already the centre of an eager group, not to be got at again lightly. The next time Mr Gilham caught sight of him, he was descending the wide staircase, surrounded as before by a crowd of attendant worshippers, who were unwilling to part with the great man, and his widely extending influence.

But great men must dine as well as small, and Mr Cray was hastening home to that necessary

meal. He extricated himself from his friends, and stepped into his cab that waited at the door: a favourite vehicle of Mark's, built under his own superintendence, in which he generally went to and fro morning and evening, driving his blood horse himself. Glancing at his watch as he dashed along Cheapside, he found it was considerably later than he had thought, and urged the horse to a quicker pace.

For Mr and Mrs Cray were expecting friends to dinner that evening. Dr Ford of Hallingham and his two daughters were making a short stay in town, and had been invited by Mark and his wife—neither of them loth to show off their new grandeur, and to send it to be talked about in Hallingham.

Suddenly Mark threw the horse nearly on his haunches, by the violence with which he pulled him up. Oswald Cray was on the pavement. He advanced to Mark at the latter's sign.

"Have you decided about the thousand pounds, Oswald?"

"Partially. I went down to Knollys's this morning, and they recommend the thing strongly. But I have worked hard for my money, Mark, and don't care to lose it."

"Lose it!" scornfully returned Mark. "The

Great Wheal Bang won't be a *losing* concern. Look here, Oswald! I have but one motive in pressing the matter upon you: this mine of wealth has come flowing into my hands, and I do consider it a great pity that you, my only brother, should not reap some benefit from it. Others, strangers, are making their thousands and thousands—or will make them; and it's nothing but wilful blindness for you to let it slip through your fingers. It's obstinate folly, Oswald. Give me the thousand pounds, and I'll soon make you ten thousand."

"The fact is, Mark, I cannot feel so positively sure of its turning out well, as you do."

"Oswald, I tell you *that it will*. I and Barker have means of knowing facts, connected with the mine, that I don't speak of, even to you. As I assured you the other day, so I repeat it; your money cannot be lost. It is a perfectly sure and safe investment; I will answer for it with my life. Will you come home and dine with us?"

"I have dined."

"Dined!" echoed Mark, rather scornfully, for he was learning to despise any but the most fashionable hours—as many another newly-made great man has learnt before him. "Come round in the evening, then, and see old Ford of Hallingham. Barker will

be there, I expect, and we can talk this over further."

Mark Cray touched his horse, and the cab and its freight bounded off. Mark did not draw rein again until Grosvenor Place was reached.

CHAPTER XLI.

A SLIGHT CHECK.

THE house was blazing with light, every window bright with it. Mrs Cray loved pomp and vanity in all their forms, and she generally caused her rooms to be lighted with the first glimmer of twilight. Mark Cray stepped into his handsome hall and was received by a couple of footmen. Flinging his hat to one, his gloves to another, he bounded up-stairs to his dressing-room, conscious that he was keeping the dinner and his guests waiting.

Did Mark Cray ever cast a sigh of regret to the simple life at Hallingham, when he and his wife used to sit down to mutton cutlets and a pudding, and think the fare good enough? Did *she* regret it at any odd moment? Not yet. Dress and dinners, with expense of other sorts, bring a fascination with them all too enthralling to the senses. How they pall upon

the wearied spirit in time, how they deaden the heart and debase the intellect, let those answer who have become their slaves ; but Mark Cray and his wife had not reached that period of weariness yet. You may be very sure, knowing what you do know of the world and the generality of people who populate it, that Mr and Mrs Cray wanted not for what is called society. The great projector of the Great Wheal Bang Company, holding in his own hands the power to make others rich, was not likely to lack adulation in his private capacity any more than in his public one, and he and his wife drank their fill of it. Mark's mind was shallow, and his head tolerably empty, but he was sufficiently attractive in manners to win his way in society, even without the adjunct just mentioned. Mark was looked upon as of good connections also ; for it had somehow got reported that he was a nephew of the proud Baronet of Thorndyke. Perhaps it may be forgiven to poor empty-headed Mark that he held his tongue from contradicting it, and suffered the world to think he was of the family of that great man. As to Caroline, people were in love with her beauty and her youth ; and the costly extravagances of the house in Grosvenor Place bore their own charm. Altogether, more guests crowded the doors of Mr and Mrs Cray

than the doors could always hold. Many satellites of the great world, of a position far above the real one of Mark Cray and his wife, flocked to pay them court; and neither of them was wise enough to see how unsuitable are extremes, or to discern that the acquaintance would never have been condescended to, but that Mark was the Great Wheal Bang's powerful chieftain. Therefore it was nothing unusual for Mark Cray to receive dinner guests at his board; on the contrary, it would have been a marked circumstance now, had he and his wife dined alone.

Mark washed his hands and hurried on his coat, and in a few minutes was at his dinner-table, his guests on either side of him. One guest at it, Mark could only regard with astonishment, and that was Miss Davenal. Not that Miss Davenal was not fitted to grace a dinner-table; no lady more so at her age in the three kingdoms; but she had so resolutely abstained from honouring Mark's house with her presence, that he had never expected to see her in it again. Caroline said she should invite her and Sara to meet their old friends the Fords, and Mark had laughed when he heard it. "She'll never come," he said; "you might as well invite the lioness from the Zoological Gardens." However, here she was: she

had chosen to come. She sat on Mark's left hand, her delicate features quite beautiful in their refinement; Miss Ford was on his right, a shrinking little woman of forty years; Miss Mary Ford and Sara Davenal were lower down; and the physician, a short, red-faced, shrivelled man, who talked incessantly and wore nankeen pantaloons, was next to Caroline. "Put a knife and fork for Mr Barker," Mark had said to his servants: but Mr Barker had not made his appearance yet. Those were all the guests.

There is something false about Caroline to-day. Look at her dress! It is white watered silk, gleaming with richness, as the dew-drops are gleaming in the white crape flowers in her hair; and it, the white silk, is elaborately trimmed with black ruchings and ribbons. That black, put on by her maid, taking the girl a whole afternoon to do it, has been added with a motive. Caroline, in her evening dress, has long put off the mourning for her good uncle, her more than father, dead though he has been but four months yet; but she is to-day a little ashamed of her haste, and she has assumed these black ribbons before these Hallingham friends and her Aunt Bettina, to make believe that she still wears it. Her violet eyes are intensely bright, and her cheeks glow with their sweetest and softest

carmine. Sara wears a black crape robe, a little edging of white net only on its low body and sleeves, and she wears no ornament, except the jet beads on her neck and arms. The two Miss Fords are in copper-coloured silks made high: when they saw Mrs Cray's white silk, fit for the court of our gracious Queen, they felt uncomfortable, and attempted a sort of apology that they had brought no evening dress with them to town.

And the dinner is in accordance with Caroline's attire. Soup, and fish, and *entrées*, and roasts, and jellies, and sweets, and fal-lals; and more sorts of wine than the Miss Fords, simple and plain, could remember afterwards to count; and flowers, and plate, and servants in abundance: and grandeur enough altogether for the dining-room of England's Premier.

It was this state, this show, this expense, that so offended the good sense (very good always, though sometimes over severe) of Miss Bettina Davenal, and kept her aloof from Mr and Mrs Cray's house. If Mark really was making the vast amount of money (but it would have taken a wiser tongue than Mark's to convince her that that usually assumed fact was not a fallacy), then they ought to be putting it by, she argued: if they were not making it, if all this was

but specious wealth, soon to pass away and leave only ashes and ruin behind it, then Mark and Caroline were fit only for a lunatic asylum. In any point of view, the luxurious appointments of the dinner she saw before her were entirely out of place for middle-class life : and Miss Bettina felt an irrepressible prevision that their folly would come home to them.

But she knew better than to mar the meeting with any unpleasant reproaches or forebodings then, and she was as cordial and chatty as her deafness allowed. It was a real pleasure to meet Hallingham friends, and Miss Bettina enjoyed herself more than she had ever done since the doctor's death.

The entertainment came to an end, and Caroline marshalled her guests to the glittering drawing-room : glittering with its mirrors, its chandeliers, and the many lights from its gilded girandoles. Dr Ford and Mark followed shortly, and found them drinking coffee. Caroline and Sara were stealing a minute's private chat together : they had lived apart of late.

"How *did* you get my aunt to come?" Caroline was asking. "We thought she never intended to honour us here."

"She came of her own accord. I did not say a word to press it. I have been so vexed this after-

noon, Caroline," resumed Sara, turning to a different subject. "My aunt has told me finally that she will not have Dick and Leo up for their holidays."

Caroline shrugged her pretty shoulders: very much as if Dick and Leo and their holidays were perfectly indifferent to her. "I don't think I should, in Aunt Bettina's place. Boys are dreadfully troublesome animals; and now that—that poor Uncle Richard is not here to keep them in order—" another shrug finished the sentence.

"Oh, but that is one reason why I so wish them to come," said Sara, her voice somewhat tremulous. "I don't expect that they can be had always; that would be unreasonable; but to stay at school just this first time after poor papa's death!—it will seem so hard to them. Caroline, could *you* not have them up?"

"*I!*" returned Caroline, amazed at the proposition.

"You have a large house and plenty of servants. It would be an act of real kindness."

"Good gracious, Sara! I'd not have them; I'd not be worried with those two boys for six weeks, if you paid me in gold and diamonds. They—who's this?"

The door had opened, and one of the servants was waiting to make an announcement:

"Mr Oswald Cray."

Caroline ran to meet him. He looked rather surprised at her attire, and began apologising in a laughing sort of way for his own morning coat. He had expected to meet only Barker and Dr Ford. A greeting to the Hallingham people, and he went up and held out his hand to Miss Davenal.

"You are a great stranger, Mr Oswald Cray. I did not suppose that the formal call you made upon me when I settled in town three months ago was to be your only one."

"I am a sadly busy man," was his answer. "Offending I fear some of my best friends through not visiting them. But I can scarcely dare to call my time my own."

"Out of town, do you say? Well, that is an excuse of course. Sara, here's Mr Oswald Cray: you used to know him in Hallingham."

The blushes tingled on her cheek as Mr Oswald Cray touched her hand. Tingled at the thought that it was not the first time they had met that day.

"What have you been doing with yourself, Oswald, since I saw you before dinner?" called out Mark, who was pointing out the beauty of the paintings on his walls to the Miss Fords.

"I have been to Pimlico since then."

"To Pimlico! Oh, I know: to that friend of yours; Allister. It strikes me you go there pretty often."

"As often as I can spare time for," returned Oswald.

Mark laughed. Had he possessed that refined regard for the feelings of others, never wanting in the true gentleman, he had not so spoken. "I know. But you need not be so close over it, Oswald. That Miss Allister is a nice girl, is she not?"

"Very," was the emphatic reply.

"One to be esteemed. Eh?"

"As few can be esteemed by me."

Oswald spoke in his coldest, most uncompromising tone: his haughty face turned almost defiantly on Mark. He was the last man to brook this sort of speech, and in that moment he despised Mark. Sara had a book in her hand, and she never raised her drooping eyelids from it. What was it to her now whom he esteemed? But she *heard*: all too plainly.

There was a pause of silence; rather an unpleasant one. It was broken by Miss Mary Ford.

"I must not forget to ask after your old servant Watton, Miss Davenal. Does she like her place? I suppose you see her occasionally."

"Thank you, I don't like it at all," returned Miss Davenal, hearing wrongly, as usual. "What was Mark asking you, Mr Oswald Cray?"

"Watton is quite well; I saw her this morning," interposed Sara, who perhaps did not care that Mark's choice of subject should again be brought forward. Mrs Cray caught up the words.

"Saw Watton this morning, Sara! Where did you see her?"

And the very moment the unlucky admission had left Sara's lips, she knew how thoughtless it was to have made it, and what an undesirable discussion it might involve.

"Where did you see Watton?" repeated Mrs Cray.

"I had a little business that way, and called upon her," replied Sara. She was obliged to speak: there was no help for it; and all the room seemed to be listening to her answer, which she had not time to weigh.

"Business down that way!" echoed Caroline. "Why, it is in the City! What business could you have there?"

"Not much: nothing of moment to you, Caroline;" and Sara, in her dismay and fear, turned and began talking rapidly to old Dr Ford.

"Aunt Bettina," called out Mrs Cray, in a slow distinct voice, "what business took Sara to the City this morning? I thought only gentlemen went there."

Aunt Bettina heard, and lifted her hand in momentary petulance, as if the subject angered her.

"You must not ask me. Sara has her own secrets, and goes her own ways since your uncle's death. I am not allowed to know them."

Sara looked up to reply, perhaps to defend herself; but she remembered what was at stake, and forced herself to silence. Better that the blame should lie upon her! She had caught a momentary glimpse of Mr Oswald Cray: he was leaning against a table in the distance, his eyes fixed upon her, reading every change in her countenance; his own face stern and impassive.

What more would have been said or asked was interrupted by the entrance of another guest. A middle-sized man of thirty, with reddish hair and whiskers, a free manner and voluble tongue. Mark started forward with a shout of welcome, and introduced him to the strangers. It was Mr Barker.

"I have brought up the grandest news, Cray," he exclaimed, in a state of excitement. "There's another lode found."

"No!" echoed Mark, his eyes sparkling. "An other lode?"

"Dutton came upon it yesterday afternoon after I wrote those few lines to you. By Jove, gentlemen"—throwing his looks round the room—"I am afraid to calculate what will be the riches of this mine! Mark, old fellow, I hope our success won't drive us into Bedlam—as the case has been with some millionaires."

Miss Bettina, who had contrived to hear, cleared her throat. "It's a great deal more likely to drive you into the union, sir."

It was so unexpected a check to Mr Barker's enthusiasm that he could only stare in amazement at Miss Bettina. He had not met her before. "Never mind her," said Mark, in an undertone, "it's only old Bett. And she's as deaf as a post."

But Mr Barker did mind. "Why, ma'am," said he, going close to her, "what do you mean?"

"I can't forget a good old proverb that I learnt in my young days, sir," was her answer: "one that I have seen exemplified times upon times in my course through life. 'He that would be rich in twelve months, is generally a beggar in six.' I know what good newly discovered mines are apt to bring, sir, however promising they may look."

Mr Barker fairly turned his back upon her; he

believed she must be little better than a lunatic ; and gave his attention to Mark and the more sensible portion of the company.

"The people are up in arms down about there," he said. "Lots of them who wrote for shares in the new allotment have not succeeded in getting any, and I thought they'd have torn me to pieces. *I* can't help it. It's a clear impossibility that the whole world can go in for being rich. If luck falls on one, it doesn't fall on another."

Dr Ford, to whom Mr Barker had seemed to appeal, nodded his head. "I hear great things of this mine, sir," said he.

"Great things !" repeated Mr Barker, as if the words were not sufficiently expressive. "It is the very grandest thing that England has seen for many a day. The golden wealth of the Spanish Main is poor, compared to it."

"I'm sure I hope it will answer."

"You—hope—it—will—answer !" echoed Mr Barker, his red face going rather purple. "Why, sir, it *has* answered. It *is* answering. I could take my interest in it into the money market to-morrow, and sell it for half a million of money. Answer !"

Oswald Cray came nearer. "When shall you begin to realise ?" he inquired.

"In about six weeks from this."

"Six weeks! Really to realise?"

"We might get some loads off before, if we chose, but we don't care to begin until the sales can go on uninterruptedly. The lead is coming up beautifully; vast quantities of it. You never saw such lead. It bangs all other in the locality into fits."

Mr Barker in his joyous excitement was scarcely choice in his mode of speech. He was not particularly so at any time. He rubbed his hands—which looked as red as if they had been digging for ore—one against another.

"A fellow came up to the place—Lord What's-his-name's agent, and began handling the specimens. 'What sort of ore d'ye call this?' he asked. 'The best that ever was dug,' some of our men answered him. 'And so it is,' said he: 'we can't get such as this out of our pit.' No more they can: not an owner of 'em in all Wales."

"But you will not be selling freely in six weeks," returned Oswald. "It is impossible."

"Impossible, is it?" retorted Mr Barker. "It would be in most cases, I grant you; it's not in ours. You go and look at the thousands of men on the works. The Great Chwddyn mine doesn't deal in impossibilities."

"Would you be so good as tell me what you call that word, sir?" asked the physician, putting his hand to his ear. "We can't get at the pronunciation of it at Hallingham."

"And we can't here," returned easy Mr Barker. "One calls it one thing and one another. As to trying to speak it like the natives, nobody can. *We* call it the Great Wheal Bang up here. Not that it's at all appropriate or correct to do so, but one can't be breaking one's teeth over the other. You see—Holloa! what's this? For me?"

One of Mark's servants had entered with a telegraphic dispatch. It was addressed to Mr Barker.

"Your man has brought it round from Piccadilly, sir. He thought it might be of moment."

"Let's see. Where's it from?—Wales? Ay. Another lode discovered, I'll be bound!"

Mr Barker carried the paper across the room, and opened it under the lights of a girandole. He stared at it more than read it; stared at the words as if unable to understand them: and a curious expression of puzzled bewilderment, half wonder, half dismay, struggled to his face. Mark Cray had come to his side, all eagerness; and Oswald was watching them from the distance.

"Is it another lode, Barker?"

"Hush! There has been a slight irruption of water," whispered Barker, thrusting the paper into his pocket. "Good heavens! that would floor us at once."

Mark Cray's mouth dropped. He stared as helplessly at Mr Barker as the latter had stared at the dispatch. The sight of his face awoke Mr Barker's caution.

"For goodness' sake, Cray, don't look like that! They'll see you, and suspect something. *This* must be kept dark, if possible. I daresay it's nothing. I'll go back again to-night."

He turned away with a beaming face to the company, laughing merrily, talking gaily. They might have well deemed that two fresh lodes had been discovered instead of one. Mark, not quite so quick in recovering his equanimity, stayed where he was before the girandole, looking in it in an absent sort of manner, and pushing his hair back mechanically. Perhaps this was the first time that even the *possibility* of failure had come close to Mark, face to face.

Barker was the first of the guests to retire, and Mark left the room with him. As the latter was returning to it he met his brother, who was also departing.

"Not going yet, Oswald! What a one you are!

—Afraid of being in the streets late, it's my belief. I say! when am I to have the thousand pounds?"

"My mind is not quite made up yet," was the answer, a rather unexpected one to Mark's ears. "Mark, did Barker get any bad news to-night?"

"Bad news!" repeated Mark, as if quite at a loss to know what could be meant.

"By that dispatch from Wales?"

"Not at all," returned Mr Mark, volubly. "He had forgotten to leave some instructions behind him, so they telegraphed. What put your head upon bad news?"

"Barker's countenance as he read the dispatch. And yours also when you joined him. You both looked as though some great calamity had occurred.

Mark laughed blithely. "Oswald, old fellow, you were always inclined to be fanciful. The mine is a glorious mine, and you'll be a blind booby if you don't secure some benefit in it. I'll answer for the safety of the investment with—with—my life," concluded Mark, speaking rather strongly in his loss for a simile. "Can't you rely upon me?"

Oh, Mark Cray! His protestations of the "safety" were excusable before, when he believed what he said: but they were not now. Since that ominous message arrived, his very heart had been quaking

within him. In the few confidential words he had just exchanged with Barker on going out, the latter had said : " We must get all the money we can, for we shall want it. Water, no matter how slight the irruption, plays the very deuce with the costs of a mine." And Mark Cray, to avert, or help to avert, or to conceal the calamity, was quite ready to sacrifice his own good faith and the money of his brother.

CHAPTER XLII.

IN THE TEMPLE GARDENS.

YOU have heard and read of those false promises that keep faith to the eye and break it to the spirit, bringing a flood-tide of anguish in their train. As such, may be described the realisation of the long-deferred hope—the money—so anxiously expected by Sara Davenal. It came in due course, after a little more waiting ; that is, the order to receive it was sent to her : but it did not bring pleasure with it. For the sales had not realised so much as was anticipated. Do they ever realise as much ? Dr Davenal had expected there would be about three thousand pounds : five hundred over and above the sum owing. But the money fell short by two hundred pounds even of this sum : and there was not enough to pay Mr Alfred King.

Oh, it was a great burthen to be thrown upon this

girl, in her early years, in her solitary loneliness ! When the news came, and the small sum of money stared her in the face in figures all black and white, she looked around her in despondency. She felt that she had no friend, save God.

Feeling half-hopeless, Sara sat down and considered what was to be done. Two thousand three hundred pounds certainly were not two thousand five hundred, and she had little expectation that Mr Alfred King would be satisfied with it. An ordinary creditor, whose debt was a legitimate one, would of course not remit two hundred pounds : but this debt was different, for she had every reason to believe it was no legitimate debt, but money paid to purchase silence. Then, a voice whispered her, they would be all the less likely to remit it ; they would hold out for it to the last farthing. *Whose* silence she could not tell. But for the mysterious hint of Mr Alfred King that others were interested in this business, she might have thought it was his alone. The disagreeable impression left upon her mind by that interview had not in the least worn away : she greatly disliked Mr Alfred King ; she very greatly disliked the thought of visiting him again.

“ Mark must help me,” she said. “ He is rolling in wealth, and two hundred pounds will not be much

to him. It will be my own money. His covenant with my dear papa was to pay me three hundred pounds yearly for five years, and he has not begun the payment yet."

Quite true! Mr Mark Cray had not yet handed over a shilling of the covenant money. Miss Davenal had pressed for some of it at the time of Mark's quitting Hallingham, but Mark had declined. She had brought it under his notice since; and Mark had made excuses still. He was not bound to pay it until the expiry of the year subsequent to Dr Davenal's death, he said; and it would be most convenient to him to pay it then. Too proud to press the matter further for her niece, Miss Davenal contented herself with a dignified silence: but she did wonder whether it was that Mark would not or could not pay it. If he could not, why then how hollow, how false was all the show and luxury they had entered on in Grosvenor Place! The real truth of the matter was, Mark's expenses of one kind or another were so great, that he had no ready money to spare; on the contrary, he was often at positive fault for some. And Mark was not a willing paymaster at the best of times: these careless, spend-thrift men frequently are not.

Yet the Great Wheal Bang was flourishing: how

flourishing, its elated shareholders could tell you ; and Oswald Cray, relying on the assurances of his brother, had embarked his thousand in it. That alarming dispatch, with its still more alarming news, had turned out to be more smoke than fire ; and when Mr Barker reached the mine, whither he had hurried with all speed, he found the danger over. There had been an irruption of water, but a very slight one ; it did not transpire beyond the locality : and Barker and Mark kept the secret well from the shareholders.

Sara went to Mark. She told him, speaking very gravely, that she had urgent need of two hundred pounds, to complete some arrangements of necessity, left in her charge by her father. Mark's answer was, that he could not help her then ; that it was not in his power. Perhaps he could not. They had not yet begun to realise, for that untoward accident, slight as it was, had served to retard the works, and there was no lead yet in the market. A short while, Mark said, and she might come to him for two thousand, and welcome, if it would be of any service to her. Large promises ! But Mark had always dealt in such.

Sara had nowhere else to turn to for money in the wide world. Her aunt she knew could not help

her ; Miss Davenal's income was of a certain extent only, and their living absorbed it. So she wrote to Mr Alfred King, and he appointed a day to meet her in Essex Street.

Once more, once more, she had to go forth to the unpleasant interview. All was unpleasant connected with it ; the object, the journey, the very house, and Mr Alfred King himself : but she was obeying the command of her dead father, she was seeking to save the reputation, perhaps the life, of her living brother ; and Sara Davenal was not one to shrink on her own account from responsibilities such as these.

But surely the spirit of mischief was in it all ! It seemed like an evil fate upon her—at least, so she thought in her vexation. For on this day, as on the other, she encountered Mr Oswald Cray.

Not at the offices, but at the gate of the Temple Garden. It occurred in this way. As before, she found she had to wait a considerable time before she could see Alfred King, and she wandered into the quiet courts of the Temple, and came to the larger Garden.

The gate-keeper would not admit her to it at first ; she had not the *entrée*, he said ; but she told him her case : that she was a stranger, and had to wait an hour and a half to keep an appointment at a solici-

tor's in Essex Street. Her sweet face and her plaintive tone—for the voice catches the mind's sorrow—won him over, and, though he grumbled a little, he let her enter. It was peaceful there; shut in from the world's turmoil: the grass was green, and the paths were smooth; and Sara sat on the bench alone, and watched the river steamers as they passed and repassed on the Thames.

It was in leaving the gardens that she encountered Mr Oswald Cray. He had business that day with a barrister in chambers, and was passing the gate as she was leaving it. Sara shrunk within the gate again, in the hope that he might not accost her.

It was a vain hope. Surprised to see her there, so far from home and alone, he inquired the reason in the moment's impulse. The crimson blush, called into her face at the meeting, faded to paleness as she answered: "An appointment." She could not say she was there for pleasure.

And, besides: that utter weariness of spirit, when we no longer struggle against fate, had grown to be hers. It seemed of little moment whether he knew her errand that day or not: a faintness of heart, not unlike despair, was weakening her energies.

"An appointment?" he repeated. "Not at the

place where I saw you before? Not with Mr Alfred King?"

"Yes, that is where I am going," she replied, feeling she could not battle against the questions. "I was to have seen Mr Alfred King at twelve; but I was late, and so I have to wait for him."

"But it is not expedient that you should go there," said Oswald.

"I must go there," she answered, all too energetically in her desperation. "Were the interview to lead to—my death, and I knew that it would, I should go."

The words, so unlike *her* calm good sense; the tone, so full of hopeless sorrow, told Oswald how full of grief must be the heart they came from. They had strolled, unconsciously perhaps, down the broad walk of the garden, and were now passing a bench. "Will you sit down for a minute," he asked, "while I say a few words to you?"

"Yes: if I have time. My appointment is for two o'clock, and I wish to be there rather before than after it."

He took out his watch, and showed it to her. There was plenty of time to spare.

"Have you to keep these appointments often?"

"I never kept but the one you know of. I hope—

I am not sure—but I hope that the one to-day will be all I shall have to keep. It is a singular chance—that you should meet me on both days!”

“I don’t think anything in the world happens by chance,” gravely observed Oswald. “Do you recollect the interview I had with you at your house, just after your father’s death?” he resumed, after a pause.

Sara turned her face to him in her surprise, “Oh yes.”

“And do you remember,” he continued, his voice assuming its sincerest and tenderest tone, “what I said at that interview?—That nothing would give me so much pleasure as to be your *friend*, should you require one. Sara—forgive me if I go back for a moment to our old familiar forms of speech—let me prove myself one now!”

“In what manner?” she asked, after some moments of hesitation.

“If I am able to understand anything of this business, you need one. You seem to stand alone in it; no one to counsel you, no one to help.”

“It is true,” she said, “I have to stand in it alone. I must stand in it alone.”

“Suffer *me* to be, so far, your friend.”

She faintly shook her head. “You could not be.”

“It is true that—that—the period has not arrived,

perhaps for either of us, when we had contemplated such a friendship might begin. But we must waive that : necessity alters cases. Sara, let me serve you ! I ask it in the name of Dr Davenal. Surely you can have no objection ?”

Her eyes were swimming in tears as she looked straight before her on the gravel path. “In anything but this, I should only be too thankful. Sometimes I feel that I am left without a friend in the wide world.”

“Why not in this ?”

“Because it is a matter that I may not confide to any one. It is”—she lowered her voice—“a secret.”

“I will be true as steel. No matter what dishonour may be in it, it shall be held sacred within my breast ; never betrayed, never spoken of. I judge that it is not a pleasant secret ; therefore I use the word, dishonour. It is more fitting that I should be engaged in this matter than you.”

For a single moment the temptation came over her to tell him what it was : just as the temptation to tell him the secret connected with Lady Oswald’s death had once momentarily assailed Dr Davenal. But it passed away almost with the thought. She could not speak of her brother’s fault ; she *could not*.

Neither might she delegate to another the last directions left to her by her father. Safely grasped in her hand, she held those sealed papers left by Dr Davenal; how could she transfer them even to Oswald Cray!

"I wish I could tell it you!" she said in a tone of pain. "But I cannot; it is not possible. You will have guessed that this is not my own secret. It is a charge that was left to me by my dear father when he was dying: and I am obliged to fulfil it. He had no one to leave it to but me."

"Your brother being away. I can understand so much. Suffer me to stand to you, in this, in your brother's place. I am sure Captain Davenal would wish it."

The faint colour of dread came into her cheeks as she thought how far he would be from wishing this discussed with Mr Oswald Cray. "I can't tell it," she murmured.

Oswald turned his gaze upon her, his dark blue eyes never more earnest, more eager.

"Will you let me urge this according to the dictates of common sense? Is it fit that you, being what you are, a lady,—young, refined, inexperienced,—should be dancing attendance at Jones and Green's offices; men who do not bear too good a reputation

in the legal world, to meet principally Mr Alfred King, a man who bears a worse?"

The crimson shone in her cheeks. Put in this way it was anything but pleasant to the refinement of which he spoke. "I know, I know," she said impulsively. "I felt terribly the going there the day you saw me; I feel it again now. But indeed I cannot help myself. It was a solemn charge left me by my father, and in going through with it I am but doing my duty. God is over me," she simply added. "I have had a great deal to try me, a great deal to bear: but I am striving to do right under Him."

Her lip quivered as she spoke, and she paused from emotion. It was too much for the stoic philosophy of Oswald Cray. All the old feelings pent up so long, buried only, not subdued, resumed their sway with uncontrollable force, like a torrent let loose down a mountain's side. He caught her hands in his; he bent his face near to hers, its whole expression one of the deepest love; his persuasive voice, trembling with agitation, was sunk to the softest whisper.

"Sara, my dearest, I still love you better than anything on earth. Heaven knows how I have striven to forget you since that cloud fell upon us.

It has been of no use. Bereft of you, life is but one long dreary path, growing more cruelly monotonous day by day."

Her heart beat wildly, and for one brief interval a hope, sweeter than any earthly dream, stole into it like a golden ray of sunshine. Only for an instant: she knew that it was but so much deceit, for him as for her.

"Are there no means by which we may forget that cloud, and return to the past?" he resumed; his voice hoarse with its emotion, and so low in tone that she could scarcely hear it. "Better to sacrifice a little prejudice, than to pass a whole life in dissatisfied pain. Let the dishonour—pardon me for thus alluding to it—rest with the dead: perhaps it has been wrong from the first to make it our sorrow."

She looked at him, not quite understanding. He saw the doubt.

"Be my wife, Sara. I can then take these troubles upon me as my legal right. On my sacred word of honour, I will never cast a reproach to the past, so much as in thought. No! I will not let your hands go until you tell me by word of mouth what I *know*—that your heart is mine still; that we *cannot* be faithless one to the other."

She felt faint with the moment's pain. The dew-

drops of emotion were gathering on her face, and he would not loose her hands that she might wipe them away.

"If we never were true to each other, let us be so now," he went on. "It is too solemn a moment for equivocation: it is no time for us to pretend ignorance of our mutual love."

It was indeed no time for equivocation, or for doubt. Sara rose superior to it. A reticence that might have been observed at another time was forgotten now in her emotion and pain.

"I have not been faithless: perhaps I never shall be. But we can never be more to each other than we are now. The dishonour clings to me, and always will cling."

"Sara! don't I say that I will forget it?"

"No; I would never bring the possibility of—of of—I think you do not understand," she broke off, lifting her white face to his. "It was not only dishonour."

"What else?"

"Crime."

A change passed over his countenance as he raised his head, which had been bent to catch the word. Soon it brightened again. Never perhaps had his besetting sin been so quiescent: but pride, even

such pride as Oswald Cray's, is a less strong passion than love.

"It was not *your* crime, Sara. And it has passed away."

"It has not passed."

"Not passed!"

"Not yet. There's danger still."

Oswald bit his lip. "Danger of what?"

"Of—of—exposure," she faintly said. "Do not force me to say more. Only believe one thing—that I can never be your wife. Do you think if there were no insuperable barrier, that *I* should made one?" she added, her face flushing a hot crimson. "Forgive me: I scarcely know what I say: but you wished that we should speak without reserve."

"Sara, let me fully understand. Do you imply that there exists any good and substantial reason *still*, call it insuperable barrier if you will, why you ought not to become my wife? Wait a moment. Before you give an answer, remember that to my heart it is fraught with either life or death."

"I do not imply it; I fully state it. Oh, don't visit it upon me!" she exclaimed, as his face seemed to be assuming its old haughtiness. "It is not my fault. I did not work the disgrace."

"No," he answered soothingly, "it is not your

fault. Forgive me," he softly whispered. "The blow to me is heavy."

"It may pass for you. It will pass. You will form new friendships, new ties, and forget the old. Better that it should be so."

"But never a new love! Never one who will be to me what the other has been."

She rose from her seat. Oswald drew her down on it again.

"As I hinted just now, Sara, the time when we may mix freely as friends has not yet come; it would not do for either of us. But I must make a last appeal to you—suffer me to be your friend, in this one strait. Is it not *possible* that I can act for you?"

"It is not possible. There are certain reasons why neither you nor anybody else can do this: and, putting these aside, there is the weighty one that it was the charge bequeathed to me, and to me alone, by my dying father. Thank you for all," she whispered, as she suddenly rose and held out her hand, her soft dark eyes speaking their thanks to his.

He rose also. He did not release her hand, but placed it within his arm to lead her up the solitary path. If those grave, middle-aged counsel, deep in

their briefs behind the dusty windows opposite, had glanced out at the interview, it probably reminded them of their own sweet spring-time.

Sara withdrew her hand at the garden-gate, but he walked by her side through the courts to Essex Street. She halted there to say adieu.

"I suppose I must not ask to accompany you!"

She shook her head. "I must be alone."

"Fare you well, then," he said. "May all good angels guard you."

Mr Alfred King was waiting for her. He was evidently not pleased at two hundred pounds of the sum being missing: but he turned it off upon the "other parties." They would not accept it, he said, unless paid in full; and he hinted at consequences to Captain Davenal. He would not sign the receipt: told Sara it was useless to unseal it: but he did write a receipt for the present cheque paid. Altogether, it was a less satisfactory interview than even the former one had been: and Sara quitted him with a sinking heart. She had not the remotest idea where to get the money; and a despairing foreboding was upon her that Edward must yet pay the sacrifice of his crime.

"How long will they wait?" she asked herself as she went shivering up Essex Street. "Suppose they

send me word that they will not wait?—that Edward—oh, if I had but the means to——”

“Well? Is the thing happily over? You said this might be the last interview.”

It was Oswald Cray. He had waited for her. Her mind was pre-occupied with its fears, almost bewildered, and she scarcely knew what she answered.

“No! it is not happily over. It is all unhappy, and I am frightened. The money I took them was—was—” she broke off with a start. Recollection had come to her.

“Was what?” he asked.

“I think I forgot myself,” she murmured, as a burning flush dyed her face. “My mind is full of trouble. Pray pardon me, Mr Oswald Cray.”

END OF VOL. II.
